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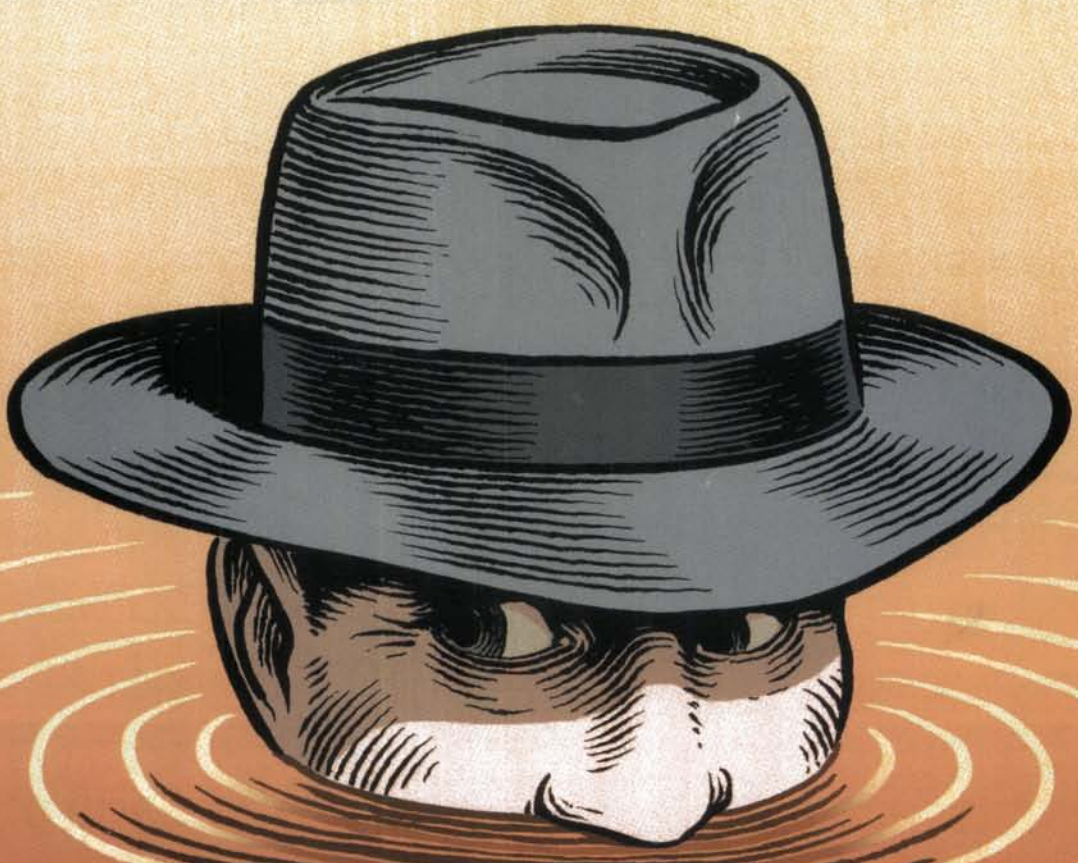

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DECEMBER 31, 2001 & JANUARY 7, 2002
ISSUES 4,537 & 4,538

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Counting backward

TO THE EDITORS:

I have to applaud Jonathan Chait's "Count Down" (November 26). I have been offended by the way so many in the media, both liberal and conservative, have handled the media-recount results. They have consistently summed them up in such simplified terms as to indicate that George W. Bush won a clean election, and that all the recount mess was unnecessary. This is a gross simplification of a very dirty process. It appears to me that many in the media have begun to believe the conservative hype that the media is biased to the left and have made an extreme correction to the point where they have become cheerleaders for the president.

MARK GRAVES
Austin, Texas

Identity politics

TO THE EDITORS:

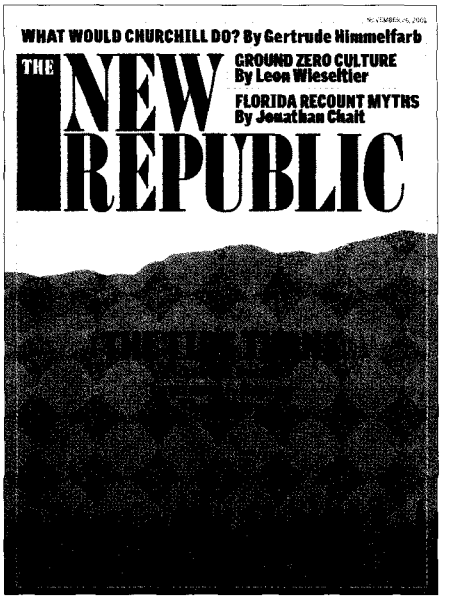
Franklin Foer describes New Hampshire Congressman John E. Sununu as an "ethnic Palestinian" ("Foreign Aid," November 26). In the ideology propagated by the Assad dynasty's vision of a Greater Syria, the territory of Palestine is termed Southern Syria. But, then again, the geography of historic Palestine covers Israel, the disputed territories termed the "West Bank," as well as Jordan. Golda Meir, Israel's former prime minister, always claimed that she was a Palestinian no less than any Arab, despite her American birth. Geography, anthropology, and ethnicity would all seem to be, in this case, a muddle. Nevertheless, could Sununu's "Palestinian ethnicity" be explained?

YISRAEL MEDAD
Shiloh, Israel

Northern lights

TO THE EDITORS:

THE NEW REPUBLIC has done an excellent job in breaking from the propaganda of other news media ("Unstated Objective," by Lawrence F. Kaplan, November 26). While the U.S. government intends to disparage the Northern Alliance, the facts reveal that the Northern Alliance has done a great service to U.S. interests over the past two months. Other news outlets, instead of reporting facts, have continued to further the war propaganda that the United Front is almost as bad as the Taliban. But we must remember that the Northern Alliance and the Burhanuddin Rabbani government are still recognized as the government-in-exile of the Islamic State of Afghanistan. As Kaplan correctly revealed, Pakistan is the cause of our problems in Afghanistan, and we Americans would do well to realize this.



ANUPUM KHAITAN
Oxford, England

Zero sum

TO THE EDITORS:

In all the literature emerging from the events of September 11, I have not read better than the last paragraph of Leon Wieseltier's Washington Diarist ("Ruins," November 26). Its powerful cry ripped open again the wounds of that day: the shock, horror, anger, and ultimately, resolution. Ironically, it is in his rejection of the elitist acculturation of September 11 that Wieseltier has created real, heartrending art. In his book *Intellectuals*, Paul Johnson warns us to "remember what intellectuals habitually forget: that people matter more than concepts and must come first." Wieseltier and the other writers at THE NEW REPUBLIC have continually and eloquently reminded us of the human tragedies on September 11.

MARK A. WILSON
Professor
Department of Geology
The College of Wooster
Wooster, Ohio

TO THE EDITORS:

I must thank Leon Wieseltier for his excellent article and its compelling imagery of the World Trade Center aftermath. Like many others, that horror touched me deeply, sympathetically, empathetically, spiritually, and intellectually; but I did not know the depth of my emotion until his article touched the raw nerve ends. Especially in the last segment of the article, where his wise choice of words held me spellbound as he observed the devastation. Through his analogy, void of academic clouding, I felt his emotional numbness; numbness beyond pain, beyond time even. Wieseltier's analogy touched my soul, and that was where I was hurting. I am now able to move past the paralysis and file this agony under Man's Inhumanities—and at my age of 90 plus, that file is close to overwhelming.

LOLA DOUGLAS-HOWARD
Pascagoula, Mississippi

Mouths that roared

TO THE EDITORS:

While I greatly envy Gertrude Himmelfarb's vast knowledge of Victorian politics and culture, I would like to respectfully disagree with her statement in her recent review of two new biographies of Winston Churchill that his father "Randolph Churchill was the most successful orator (or demagogue, his critics had it) of his time" ("The Roar," November 26). I would say that honor belongs to W.E. Gladstone. Gladstone's speeches as chancellor of the exchequer in the 1850s were regarded as cogent and spellbinding, and made theretofore dry matters of governmental finance interesting to the wider public. He could also rip Benjamin Disraeli to shreds in such matters during the give and take of debate.

Gladstone's many and lengthy public addresses in the Bulgarian Agitation of the mid- and late-1870s are also thought to have had an almost Nuremberg Rally flavor to them—far more influential in their impact than Randolph Churchill's flashy appearances on the hustings or his cheap theatrics in the House of Commons. Finally, Gladstone's first great speech on home rule (1886) was anticipated and discussed far more than anything Churchill ever carried off. Gladstone could be a great humbug and windbag; but he also had an impressive physical presence and a grasp of the rhetorical arts that left would-be rivals like Churchill in the dust. Interestingly, it was the Marquis of Salisbury, a notoriously poor speaker, who outwitted Randolph Churchill, leaving Churchill's political career in shreds.

HOPE LEMAN
Corvallis, Oregon

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TRB

FROM WASHINGTON

Politics and Prose

ABOUT HALFWAY THROUGH Bernard Lewis's essay, "The Revolt of Islam," in the November 19 issue of *The New Yorker*, I began to suspect something had changed. First of all, I was reading an essay—not a narrative, not a profile, not a memoir. It contained no elegant descriptions, no telling details, no first-person interjections; the language was straightforward, even flat. The writer was a historian, not a trendy academic-entrepreneur like Henry Louis Gates Jr. or Simon Schama, but an old-fashioned, even reactionary, historian of the Arab world. The middle of the essay read like a textbook: "Then came the great change. The second Turkish siege of Vienna, in 1683, ended in total failure, followed by a headlong retreat—an entirely new experience for the Ottoman armies." And it ended on a broad, didactic note: "In most other countries of the region, there are people who share our values, sympathize with us, and would like to share our way of life. They understand freedom, and want to enjoy it at home. It is more difficult for us to help those people, but at least we should not hinder them." I loved it.

Since September 11 many critics have noted that the press has become more serious. And that's certainly true. But there are different ways to become more serious. And what's striking is that highbrow newspapers and highbrow magazines have become more serious in opposite ways. The magazines have done it by becoming more dry, and the newspapers have done it by becoming more moist.

Before September 11 the hottest magazine journalism was anthropological. *The New Yorker*'s Malcolm Gladwell attained journalistic stardom by exposing the intricate mechanisms of everyday life—how fads begin, how information flows, how neighborhoods change. *The Weekly Standard*'s David Brooks, who called his hugely successful *Bobos in Paradise* a "description of the ideology, manners and morals" of the post-cold-war elite (and who has himself recently noted the shift from the kind of writing he perfected), also wrote primarily about lifestyle—on the assumption that lifestyle, more than anything else, defined our age. In 1999 *The New York Times Magazine* named its new front section "The Way We Live Now." A "Letter to the Reader" explained, "The section is about day-to-day living—work, family, sour milk in the fridge—all the stuff that occupies most of our actual time." And in 2001 alone, the *Times Magazine* ran cover stories on allergies, Ecstasy, OxyContin, and mold. As Brooks has noted, it wasn't an age of grand assertions.

But it quickly became clear that this kind of writing didn't work as well after September 11. In its first issue after the attacks, *The New Yorker* didn't ask experts to explain the attack; it asked writers to describe it—John Updike, Jonathan Franzen, Amitav Ghosh, Roger Angell, Rebecca Mead. And as TNR's Leon Wieseltier has written, the exercise—filled with sentences like, "[I]t fell straight down like an elevator, with a tinkling shiver and a groan of concussion distinct across miles of air"—provided "a cautionary illustration of the limitations of literariness." The kind of exquisite description that brought forth drama from the everyday seemed excessive, even grotesque, when applied to mass carnage in downtown New York.

Perhaps in part as a result, two different genres—genres deeply out of fashion in the 1990s—have now reemerged. The first is the essay—the non-reported, non-narrative, political or historical analysis. The second is the somber profile of a person in power. Bill Keller's cover story on Colin Powell in the November 25 *Times Magazine* contained phrases like, "the world had delivered up a whopper of a problem, and he was in his element" and "his comforting charisma, his ally-charming skills and his experience of war [are] all placed at a premium by the terror attacks of September 11." Like Lewis's essay, the article contained little description, no irreverence, and no edge. It quoted Powell at length, as if one of journalism's main duties were simply to communicate what America's leaders believe. To be sure, Powell has long been the object of hero-worship. But post-9/11, it's not just him. On November 18, *Parade*, a magazine previously more concerned with Garth Brooks and Kiefer Sutherland, put a melancholy black-and-white photo of Donald Rumsfeld on its cover. The article's title: "We Have to Defend Our Way of Life."

All in all, I prefer this new gravity. And I prefer it in post-September 11 newspaper writing as well. But if magazines have become more grave by becoming more stiff, newspapers have become more grave by becoming less so. The effect has been particularly noticeable in the pages of the stiffest paper of all, *The New York Times*. It's as if the Gray Lady's editors decided that in the wake of an attack on its hometown, emotional restraint would be obscene. The result is the heartrending "Portraits of Grief" page, radically different in tone from the paper's formulaic, just-the-facts obituaries. And the "Portraits of Grief" ethos has infected the entire "Nation Challenged" section. Consider this paragraph in a piece about the recent Osama bin Laden tape: "All across New York and its suburbs, from the mayor to the master mechanic at ground zero, the reaction was personal. Gut-wrenching personal. Furiously personal. Get-this-guy-now personal. So personal that some people said they even became nauseous." Or consider the *Times*' emotional descriptions of post-Taliban Kabul: "Afghans had emerged, battered but unbowed, from yet another war." And: "It was a mission she could never have undertaken under the Taliban. Now, at least, she is free to beg."

In part, these divergent responses reflect the dual nature of this new era: One journalistic template is the cold war; the other is Oklahoma City. And since most newspapers—even the *Times*—are more local than most magazines, it's not surprising that the former would adopt the voice of a traumatized community and the latter would turn to geopolitical analysis.

Both adjustments leave the culture better off because each, in its own way, represents a recognition that, post-September 11, elites must be less detached. By identifying as fiercely with the firefighters and the "bridge-and-tunnel" bond traders as the *New York Post*, the *Times* tells its rich and powerful readership—which often seems to float above the city—that this happened to them. And by ditching its knowing microportraits in favor of a forthright effort to explain the forces and people that shape this new era, elite magazines like *The New Yorker* tell their elite audiences that they can no longer observe American society from a safe remove. American society is just beginning the enormous task of reorganizing itself politically and psychologically now that our assumption of safety is gone. And American journalism, after a long while on the sidelines, is back in the game.

PETER BEINART

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Wrong Address

STOP THE PRESSES. Put down the guns. Prepare the olive branches. Yasir Arafat has made a speech in which he has agreed that the regular killing of innocent Israeli men, women, and children is bad for peace, and should even stop. The speech on December 16 was supposed to be a historic intervention in the midst of a disaster, the oration for which all decent people in this year of murder by suicide have been waiting, the momentous eruption of an official Palestinian conscience about Palestinian terror. To be sure, the speech was given under pressure, but it was designed to give evidence of grace under pressure.

Instead it gave evidence of disgrace under pressure. Read it carefully and wince. The required words of conciliation are there—"I reiterate the declared cease-fire," Arafat said, the reiteration being made necessary by the endless violation of the cease-fire by wired young Palestinians hating their way to heaven—and so were the words that the Western governments were keen to hear—"to totally stop all actions including the suicidal attacks that we have condemned, and [we] will pursue their sponsors and organizers." Progress, yes? Progress, no. Arafat's allegedly golden words were set in a context of alibis, extenuations, and affirmations of precisely the mentality that the speech was supposed to delegitimate. This great address against the politics of martyrdom began this way: "Brothers and sisters, my fellow citizens and striving brave Palestinians; mothers, fathers and brothers of the martyrs; you who have sacrificed the dearest of our children for the sake of victory and freedom, and for the sake of the holy city of Jerusalem..." Not a castigation of eschatological violence, exactly. And the speech ended this way: "To all my beloved fellow brave citizens in Palestine and in the exile, I greet you all and call on you to plant an olive tree on each martyr's grave..." Nudge, nudge. Wink, wink. Bomb, bomb.

And on what grounds did the Palestinian leader exhort his people to turn away from the sickening fashion in hallowed terror? Not on the grounds that the fashion is sickening. Nowhere in Arafat's text is there even a hint that such actions are wrong. Instead reasons of expediency are given. The suicide bombings, Arafat explained, are tactically foolish, because they "provide the Israelis with excuses to massacre our children and women." They are also politically dangerous, because they threaten the authority of the Palestinian Authority, Arafat's own authority. "[O]nly one Authority ... must be obeyed, and its agreements must be respected." Clearly Arafat has recognized that Hamas's blood-soaked strategy is aimed not only against Israel but also against himself. His objective (as usual) is not Israeli-Palestinian peace, but his own survival.

He is right to worry. No sooner had he delivered his speech than Hamas and Islamic Jihad warned Arafat (in the words of Clyde Haberman of *The New York Times*) "not to count on their cooperation." Hamas issued a statement that "urges all forces to stand in one line and as one body in the trench of resistance." The theocrats, too, are insisting upon Palestinian unity. The recent attacks against Israelis on both sides of the green line represent not least an attempt to overthrow Arafat. Hamas is making its move. It is acting as if it believes that history is on its side. There is a war going on inside the Palestinian world, and Hamas appears to be winning it, not least because the craven Arafat has refused to really fight it. That is why Arafat, as Ariel Sharon declared, is irrelevant. Spinelessness is always irrelevant. Arafat presents no alternative to Hamas, morally and politically and militarily, upon which Palestinians and Israelis can rely. Instead of reversing the slide of Palestinian society into sacralized rage, he is trying to keep up with it. He is not leading, he is coping.

You do not dissuade people from using a discourse by using it yourself. No cease-fire will hold, no peace will come, no Palestinian state will be established, unless the mixture of jihad and expediency that now characterizes the Palestinian community is unambiguously repudiated. Another improvisation in the wake of another atrocity will not suffice. It was no wonder, then, that even the secretary of state did not fall for Arafat's ploy. "It's been clear from the beginning that we have had many words pass back and forth," Colin Powell said, "and now we ... have to see his action." Has Yasir Arafat lost the support of the Department of State? Few stranger things could have happened, if indeed this has happened; but this is a season of strange things. ■

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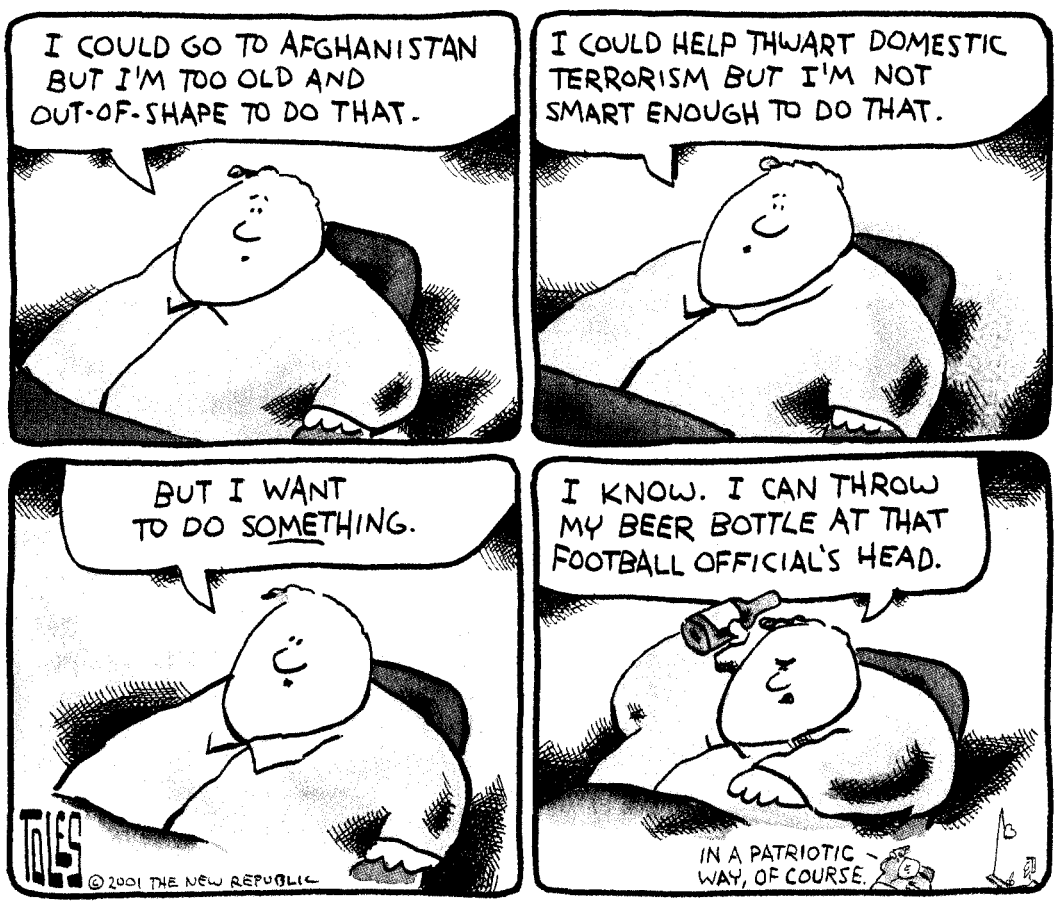
NOTEBOOK

ARI FLEISCHER OUT-OF-THE-LOOP WATCH: For months, members of the White House press corps have played a guessing game called "How out of the loop is Ari Fleischer?" Some briefing-room scribes even keep a tally of White House decisions and events about which the president's press secretary was completely oblivious. There was last February's presidentially authorized strike on Iraq—a mission Fleischer learned about from the press. There was the stem-cell decision, Bush's most important pre-9/11 policy announcement, which occurred while Fleischer was on vacation and was handled by Karen Hughes. And now Fleischer has admitted that the president never told him about last Friday's procedure to remove four lesions from his face. After Fleischer failed to mention the procedure in either his morning or afternoon briefing on Monday, curious reporters who noticed marks on the president's face at a photo op started asking questions. The White House soon released a statement explaining that doctors had removed the lesions, two of which were precancerous, on Friday in the White House physician's office. Here's how Fleischer explained the time lag between the medical procedure and the White House's disclosure of it: "As soon as I saw the president, I talked to the president. The president agreed to put out a statement. I put out a statement. So it wasn't as if you were told because you saw it, you were told because I saw it. And that is why the press received the notification it received." In other words, not only did Bush's spokesman not know that his boss had had minor surgery, he apparently hadn't even *seen* the president since Friday—even though the president spent the weekend in Washington rather than at Camp David, and even though Bush's weekend was filled with furious negotiations over the stimulus package at home and the climactic battle at Tora Bora abroad. "From the beginning of the administration there have been two questions involving Ari—one revolving around his candor and credibility, and the other the degree of access he has," says a top White House reporter. "This latest episode provides a fairly clear answer to the second question."

FREEDOM FIGHTERS: Five years ago Congress passed the Freedom to Farm Act, an admirable effort to phase out the indefensible subsidies that have for decades lavished billions of taxpayer dollars upon agribusiness. Unfortunately, in the years since, Congress has passed a series of supposedly one-time "emergency" payments to farmers that essentially circumvent this reform. This year, apparently tired of pretending, Congress seems set to do away with Freedom to Farm altogether; it is currently debating a bill to extend farm payments by $171 billion over ten years. While both parties are implicated in this monstrosity, the GOP has put up at least token opposition. Majority Leader Tom Daschle, by contrast, is aggressively shepherding the bill through. "We'll be here next week and the week after and the week after that if we have to," Daschle told *Roll Call* on December 12. On the one hand, Daschle's fervent support is not surprising—nearly three-quarters of farmers in South Dakota and Iowa (whose senator, Tom Harkin, is another driving force behind the bill) would benefit from it, as opposed to fewer than one-tenth of the farmers in several other states. On the other hand, Daschle is the chief spokesman for a party that has spent much of this year attacking the White House for two things: abandoning fiscal discipline, and giving handouts to rich businesses rather than to people who really need them. Congratulations, Senator. You've just violated both principles at once.

OFF-BROADWAY: Speaking of handouts, the Giuliani administration last week decided to bolster New York's


I COULD GO TO AFGHANISTAN BUT I'M TOO OLD AND OUT-OF-SHAPE TO DO THAT.
I COULD HELP THWART DOMESTIC TERRORISM BUT I'M NOT SMART ENOUGH TO DO THAT.
BUT I WANT TO DO SOMETHING.
I KNOW. I CAN THROW MY BEER BOTTLE AT THAT FOOTBALL OFFICIAL'S HEAD.
IN A PATRIOTIC WAY, OF COURSE.
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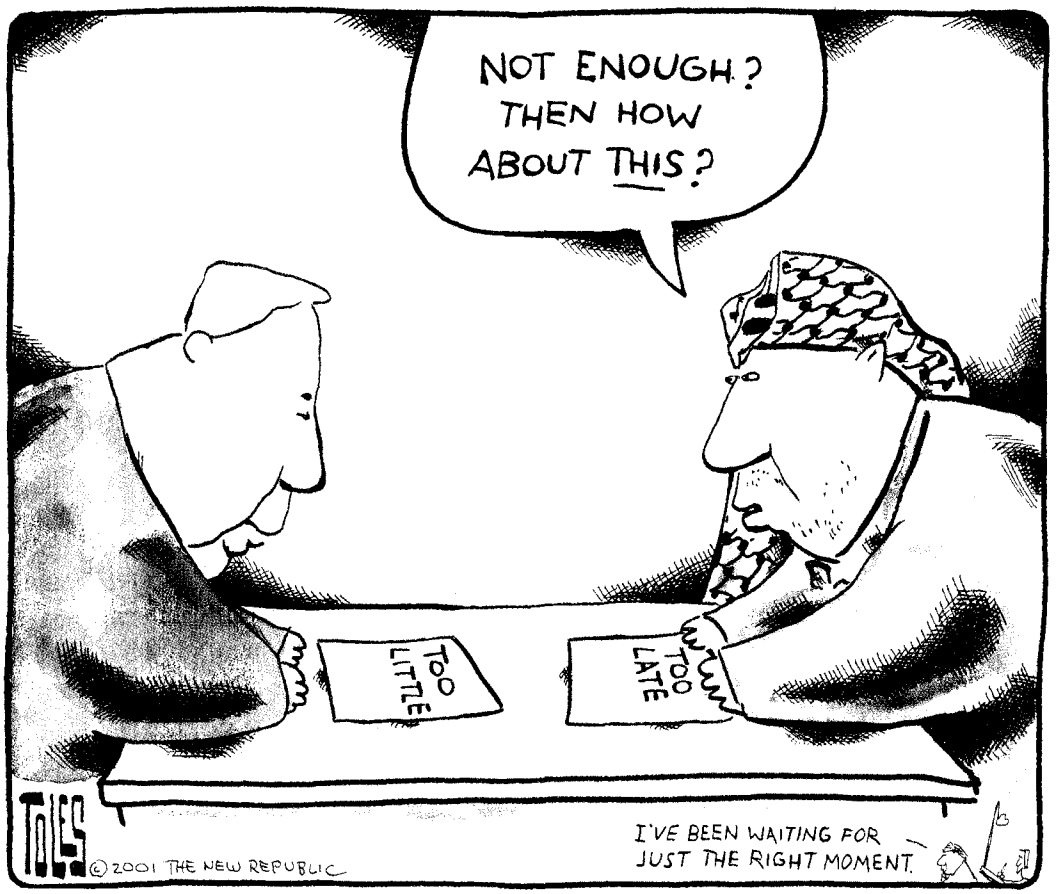
big bounce-back by purchasing $2.5 million in tickets to Broadway shows over the next several months. The tickets will be distributed to rescue workers, victims' families, and tourists who spend at least $500 during January and February. The subsidized shows include *Beauty and the Beast*, *Cabaret*, *Les Misérables*, *Chicago*, and *The Phantom of the Opera*—not exactly productions whose casts are struggling to keep their spot on the Great White Way. One typical description of such naked preferences is "industrial policy." Another is "pork." Oh no, say the beneficiaries of the Broadway boondoggle. "I would never say that Broadway is more or less worthy than anything else," said Jed Bernstein of the League of American Theaters and Producers. Tell that to the city's sports teams, movie theaters, nightclubs, restaurants, museums, off-Broadway performers, musicians, dancers, and pretzel stands that aren't entitled to the subsidy, not to mention the folks who might prefer to watch five movies instead of one play. After all, the point of a recession is that it hits the economy as a whole, and the point of intelligent economic policy is to help the economy *as a whole*. Whether New Yorkers spend their money on Broadway or at Bergdorf's is not a question they need Rudy Giuliani to answer.

SO AWFUL: If Geraldo Rivera possesses one journalistic gift, it's the gift of low expectations. His early performance as a Fox News "war correspondent" in Afghanistan—the controversies over his decision to carry a pistol and his stated desire to kill Osama bin Laden, his endless confusion of the story of the war with the story of Geraldo—would have ruined the reputation of a typical journalist; it only confirmed his. But low expectations can excuse only so much. They cannot, for example, excuse the problems, first reported by *The Baltimore Sun*, with Geraldo's impassioned description of his visit to the site of a fatal American friendly-fire episode. "[Y]esterday, we did walk over what I consider hallowed ground," Geraldo told viewers on December 6. "And it was—you know, it's just breathtaking, it's just so awful, the whole area kind of vaporized, little tatters of uniform everywhere. It was the saddest place I've ever been in my life. I stopped and I said the Lord's Prayer." The problem is that the friendly-fire episode to which he was referring, which claimed the lives of three Americans, took place near Kandahar; Geraldo was far away at Tora Bora at the time. He initially blamed the "fog of war," claiming that he had confused that friendly-fire incident with another that took place at Tora Bora and claimed the lives of mujahedin but no Americans. But as the *Sun* pointed out, the Pentagon says this latter accident didn't take place until December 9, three days *after* Geraldo's report. Back in November, Geraldo explained his decision to leave his CNBC talk show for the war-reporting gig by saying, "I'm a reporter, and this fight against terror is the biggest story of our times.... I'm going to go wherever the action is." Or, apparently, where it isn't.



NO WONDER HE GETS ALONG SO WELL WITH W.: "STIMULAS [SIC] NEEDED"—a sign hung on a broken Senate elevator by pro-stimulus deal-maker Senator John Breaux, as reported in *Roll Call*, December 17

SO DO WE: "Personal rationalization or political realism? Depends on your view. I know how it looks from here."—Senator John Kerry in *The Boston Globe*, describing his decision to form a political action committee to raise money for other Democrats, December 19. In the past, Kerry has made much of his refusal to accept PAC money. ■

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Ramallah Dispatch

Lock Step

By JOSHUA HAMMER

ABDUL HAKIM MASSALMEH never made a secret of his double life. The co-owner of a travel agency called Jordan River Travel & Tourism in downtown Ramallah, Massalmeh spent his days hunched over a computer in a storefront office, booking clients on discount flights from Amman to Saudi Arabia and Dubai. But Massalmeh also had another identity: He was one of the most incendiary leaders of the radical Islamic Jihad movement. An ardent proponent of suicide bombings and a critic of Yasir Arafat, Massalmeh frequently interrupted his workaday life to attend secret meetings with fellow *jihadis* and grant interviews to journalists. When I caught up with him at his travel agency two days after suicide bombings killed 25 Israelis in early December, he had just returned to the office following a night in a Ramallah jail. "The Palestinian Authority is always trying to muzzle me," he said as a handful of customers waited to make plane reservations. "I just laugh in their faces."

He's not laughing anymore. Last week I returned to Ramallah to find Massalmeh gone and his travel agency deserted. Khalil Deeb Arafat, a grizzled old man in a kaffiyeh who said he was Massalmeh's closest friend, was minding the empty shop. "Four security men from the Palestinian Authority arrested him before dawn at his home ten days ago," he told me. "He has been in jail ever since." Massalmeh was being held with 15 other prisoners from Islamic Jihad and Hamas in three large, barred rooms under heavy guard at the detention center inside Palestinian Authority headquarters.

Massalmeh could be in for a long stay. In the wake of this month's suicide bomb attacks in Jerusalem and Haifa, and intensifying pressure from the United Sates and Israel, Arafat has launched his most serious crackdown on the militants since he sprung dozens of them from Palestinian jails at the start of the intifada more than a year ago. Palestinian security forces have arrested 150 activists and shut down dozens of offices, many of them belonging to fundamentalist charities like the Islamic Charitable Foundation, which had run orphanages and food distribution programs in refugee camps while reportedly spreading the call for martyrdom. The crackdown leaves Arafat in a tense double standoff. On one front, Hamas and Islamic Jihad have rejected his calls for a total cease-fire and vowed to continue suicide bombings until the occupation ends. On the other, the Israeli government is still threatening Arafat's leadership if the violence continues, while showing no signs of stopping its targeted killings of militants—assassinations that have provoked retaliatory suicide attacks in the past. "The conflict has reached a crossroads," Hisham Ahmed, an expert on Islamic radical movements at Ramallah's Birzeit University, told me. "Arafat has staked his leadership on these arrests. But if he can't show his people tangible results soon, his rule could easily collapse."

The fragility of Arafat's position has become readily apparent. During the last two weeks he's had his helicopters in Gaza destroyed by Israeli rockets, been placed under virtual house arrest in Ramallah, and been publicly dismissed as "irrelevant" by Prime Minister Ariel Sharon. Last week, about 300 yards up the main road from Arafat's sprawling headquarters, two Israeli armored cars and two jeeps took up positions in front of a four-story office building—the deepest penetration yet into the Palestinians' West Bank capital.

For Arafat, the silver lining is that such humiliations have, ironically, bolstered his stature with his own people. Many Palestinians have rallied around him as a beleaguered symbol of their struggle, and protests were relatively muted when his security forces began rounding up Hamas and Islamic Jihad activists earlier this month. Indeed, despite Hamas's soaring popularity, Palestinians now seem to recognize that Arafat's fall could usher in something far worse: an Islamic fundamentalist state or Israeli reoccupation. A half-dozen people I spoke to on the streets of Ramallah said they were willing to take a breather from the intifada to bolster Arafat, though they were skeptical that a cease-fire would lead anywhere. "I don't want to end the uprising. It will mean that all the martyrs have died for nothing," said Inaz, a 20-year-old woman, as she waited with her three children at the Qalandia checkpoint outside Ramallah, a tangle of concrete barricades, barbed wire, and rubble overlooked by a hilltop Israeli bunker. "But Arafat is our president, and we have to listen to him. There is nobody who could take his place."

STILL, IT'S UNCLEAR whether Arafat's current popularity will translate into results on the ground. His own Fatah organization, whose Tanzim guerrillas have carried out dozens of ambushes of Israeli settlers during the 15-month uprising, have grown increasingly defiant. (According to Israeli statistics, more than 50 percent of the 2,750 attacks in Jerusalem and the territories during the intifada have been the work of Fatah Tanzim.) Days before Arafat's crackdown, Marwan Barghouti, the leader of the Tanzim in the West Bank, told me he strongly opposes arrests of militants as long as the occupation continues, and insisted that settlers and soldiers in the territories are "legitimate targets." (Last week Barghouti wouldn't take my calls, and sources told me that Arafat had pressured him hard to avoid the appearance of an open rift with the Palestinian leadership.) And just hours after Arafat's televised call for a cease-fire on December 16, members of the Al Aqsa Martyrs Brigade, an offshoot of the Tanzim, allegedly carried out an attack in the West Bank that injured three Israelis. Other Fatah leaders I talked to also resisted Arafat's pleas for calm. "I don't agree with the president's call to stop all military operations against Israeli settlers and military bases," one leader of Fatah's youth wing in Ramallah told me. "For now I think most Tanzim will obey the president—but it may not last long." And Hamas and

JOSHUA HAMMER is Jerusalem bureau chief for *Newsweek*.

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The High School Diploma Drought

Chester E. Finn Jr. is a distinguished visiting fellow, Hoover Institution; member, Hoover's Koret Task Force on K–12 education; and president, Thomas B. Fordham Foundation.

If you're a young American, graduating from high school makes an enormous difference in everything that follows. If you have that diploma, you can go to college, employers will look twice at you, and your lifetime earnings will be a lot higher than those of your age mates who lack that credential.

Yet the high school graduation rate has not been getting the attention it warrants. With the federal government reporting a completion rate of 86 percent, many people believe that today just about everyone in the United States makes it through high school except a smallish number of hapless "dropouts." Hence most educators and policymakers have shifted their attention to the high school–college transition and to college completion rates.

That shift is premature, according to a sobering new study of high school graduation rates by scholar Jay P. Greene, conducted on behalf of the Black Alliance for Educational Options.

Greene recalculates these rates using a simple but plausible method that discounts "equivalency certificates" (the so-called GED) and adjusts for distortions in the federal data. His conclusion: Only 74 percent of those who should have graduated from high school in 1998 actually did so.

Yet that's the good news. The chilling news is that just 56 percent of blacks and 54 percent of Latino youngsters received diplomas "on schedule" in 1998. This suggests an educational crisis among minority youths that's worse than most of us had realized. Although some of these boys and girls will end up with belated diplomas or GEDs, Greene's data show that nearly half of them are entering adulthood behind the educational eight ball.

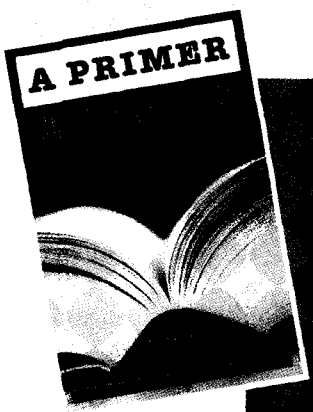
High school completion rates also turn out to vary hugely by state and community. Ninety-three percent of Iowa's young people graduated in 1998, but only 57 percent of Georgia's did. Graduation rates among large school districts range from 82 to 87 percent in Albuquerque, Boston, and the Washington suburbs down to 47 percent in Chicago, 43 percent in Milwaukee, and a numbing 28 percent in Cleveland.

Although state and municipal differences are influenced by student demographics, Greene found that there's more to this story. For example, 85 percent of Boston's African American students graduate, but only 34 percent of black students in Louisville accomplish this. In El Paso two-thirds of Latinos graduate, but in Dallas less than two-fifths do so. Other factors are plainly at work besides race and ethnicity, factors having to do with the schools themselves.

Whereas graduation rates alone are not a satisfactory gauge of educational performance—it's possible to pump them up by making it easier to graduate—they're a telling clue as to whether an education system is succeeding. **If just three-quarters of young Americans—and barely half of black and Latino students—are managing to graduate from high school on time, we've got a whopping problem.** This one probably can't be solved by ratcheting up academic standards and or requiring more tests. Even at today's low levels, these methods are not yielding success for millions of young Americans.

— Chester E. Finn Jr.

Paid for by the Hoover Institution, Stanford University.



Want to learn more about K–12 education policy?

Visit us on-line at **www.hoover.org** *or contact us to receive a complimentary copy of* **A Primer on America's Schools**—*11 chapters by Hoover's Koret Task Force on K–12 Education.*

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Islamic Jihad, who think Arafat may finally be weak enough to bring down, are even less likely to hold their fire. "The ability of the radicals to strike has been badly affected by the arrests, but you have substitutes who can emerge right away," says Hisham Ahmed of Birzeit University.

For all these reasons, most people I've talked to on both sides don't give the latest cease-fire much chance of success. They see parallels between the current calm and the calm that followed the suicide bombing of the Dolphinarium disco in Tel Aviv last June. Then, too, international pressure forced Arafat to call a cease-fire; then, too, there were earnest American calls for renewed dialogue, the lifting of restrictions on Palestinian movement, and the rapid implementation of the Mitchell Plan. But Arafat was never able—or willing—to achieve the seven days of "complete quiet" Sharon demanded, and sporadic attacks on Israeli soldiers and settlers soon escalated into a new wave of Israeli assassinations of Islamic radicals and retaliatory suicide bombs. The difference is that, this time, failure may mean Arafat's removal from power—or even death. "It will be a calamity for him," says Hisham Ahmed. Last week, just past Arafat's headquarters in Ramallah, hung a white banner quoting Israeli Foreign Minister Shimon Peres: "BETTER TO HAVE THE PAINS OF PEACE THAN THE AGONIES OF WAR." Arafat may have gotten the message too late. ■

What the Islamic world can learn from Spain.

Death Trap

By MARTIN PERETZ

THE FRISSON OF death, of killing others and of dying oneself in the process, is alien to our culture—although it was not always so. In the West, large numbers of people no longer experience an emotional thrill or a shiver of excitement at the shedding of blood—even the blood of our enemies. But perhaps in part as a result of that civilizational advance, we have more enemies than ever. Maybe seeing oneself as America's enemy gives largeness to small and narrow lives. It once did so in parts of Latin America; it may still in hypernationalist China. But there can be no question that today, it is in the lands of Islam where the greatest number of lives are invigorated by ecstatic hatred of the United States. We see this ecstasy, at once joyful and enraged, from Gaza to Egypt to the Gulf to South Asia. In all those societies that feel that America—rather than their own deficiencies—has cheated them of their destiny.

Sleiman Abou-Gheith, an Al Qaeda spokesman featured on Osama bin Laden's October 9 videotape, suggests that the moral contrast between bin Laden's followers and their enemies in the West lies in their disposition toward life itself. "There are thousands of our young people," Abou-Gheith exudes, "who look forward to death like the Americans look forward to living." That is a truly astounding sentence, and a truly chilling one. If the jihadist's love of death is really the equivalent of the American's love of life, then death has rarely been so passionately loved. And can there be any doubt that this impulse—to count other people's lives as cheap but symbolically worth taking—is a primary force in the politics of nascent Palestine? Or that many of the schools funded by Islamic charities and Saudi billionaires devote themselves to teaching their students that a good life ends in a deadly climax; not with a whimper, but with a bang?

In his most recent tape, bin Laden confides to his guests what one of his comrades reported to him a year earlier: "I saw in a dream, we were playing a soccer game against the Americans. When our team showed up on the field, they were all pilots." The Americans lost. "That was a good omen for us." Soccer is apparently a common metaphor amongst the terrorists. In fact, the conflation of soccer with terror suggests just how banal, how commonplace, Islamist terror is. Abou-Gheith tells bin Laden that he was watching on his own television a report about an Egyptian family sitting in their living room watching "the big event" on television. "They exploded with joy. Do you know when there is a soccer game and your team wins? It was the same expression of joy."

Bin Laden also recounts the dream of his Al Qaeda associate, Abu Daud: "He came close and told me that he saw, in a dream, a tall building in America, and in the same dream he saw the Mukhtar teaching the brothers how to play karate.... I was worried that maybe the secret would be revealed if everyone starts seeing it in their dreams." The World Trade Center attack was, in this telling, not really bin Laden's scheme, but Allah's.

Since September 11 I have been haunted by a memory of my youth. I once fancied myself a historian of the Spanish Civil War. Some of my college classmates studied with the extraordinary intellectual historian Frank E. Manuel because of his Enlightenment scholarship. I studied with him because of his book *The Politics of Modern Spain* (and also, not coincidentally, his other work, *The Realities of American-Palestine Relations*). I was not particularly intrigued by the Republican cause, already falsified beyond recognition both by vaguely leftish naïfs and more cynical Stalinists. What held me was the nihilism of the specifically Spanish clerico-fascism that gave this ideology, for all its murderous deeds, or perhaps because of them, a distinctly macabre romance.

"*¡Viva la muerte!*" Long live death! In Spain in the '30s, it roused crowds of the Fascist right to frenzy. It was the rallying cry of one Jose Millan Astray, commander of the Spanish Foreign Legion, one of Franco's insurgent generals, whose body bore the stigmata of battle. He was, the historian Hugh Thomas tells us, "a man from whom there seemed more shot away than there was of flesh remaining ... but one leg, one arm, few fingers left on his one remaining hand." He was apparently fearless. In the strenuous 1936 Battle of Madrid, the conquest of University City was a prime Fascist goal, and Millan Astray's other rousing catchphrase, "*¡Abajo la inteligencia!*" did some of the literal rallying. "Down with intelligence!" These twin appeals to nihilism, the twin appeals of a shard of a man, always mustered the mob.

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Until one day, when the Festival of the Race—a Fascist contrivance—was being celebrated at the University of Salamanca, one of the world's oldest institutions of higher learning, in the presence of the bishop, the civil governor, Señora Franco, and Millan Astray. In the chair as rector of the university was one of the not inconsiderable number of intellectuals who, appalled by the Communist takeover of the Republic and by Republican atrocities, had gone over to the rebels. He was the great classicist and philosopher Miguel de Unamuno, known to us primarily as the author of *The Tragic Sense of Life*, the leading spirit of Spain's Generation of '98, an ornament of civilization itself. But Millan Astray shouted the usual demented words nonetheless.

"Just now," Unamuno intoned, "I have heard a necrophilious and senseless cry: 'Long live death.' And I, who have spent my life shaping paradoxes ... I must tell you that this outlandish paradox is repellent." He went on a bit about the Fascist indulgence of mutilation and destruction, and then Millan Astray once again shouted, "Down with intelligence!" And Unamuno left the ceremonial hall. On the morrow he was placed under house arrest. And within a few months he was dead.

Too few—far too few—voices from the religious, political, and intellectual citadels of the Islamic world have raised such a blunt and eloquent protest today. Only days before we all saw bin Laden laughing at death, Prince Nayef—the Interior Minister of Saudi Arabia, the country whose idle rich financed September 11, and around which Colin Powell has fabricated a sham coalition—explained that "no one has found any proof" that 15 Saudis participated in the attacks. The media tell us over and over that these murderers are marginal, just Osama bin Laden and a few scattered lookalikes. But our serenity says more about America's tendency to project its liberal assumptions onto other societies than about any deep understanding of the forces at play in the Muslim world. A closer, harder look would show that the Millan Astrays are not marginal at all. "Down with intelligence" and "Long live death," I fear, are rousing the masses once more. ■

On the Hill

Switch Hit

By Michael Crowley

Seven months after Vermont Senator Jim Jeffords left the Republican Party and altered the balance of power in Washington, he remains something of an icon. Consider the recent book-signing Jeffords held at a Borders in downtown Washington to celebrate the publication of his triumphant *My Declaration of Independence*. One after another, Jeffords's beaming fans called him a hero and an inspiration, and asked to snap his picture. A starry-eyed blonde showed up with ten copies of his book. After signing the whole stack, Jeffords kissed her hand. "I'll remember that!" she exclaimed, wandering off with a giddy smile.

The national media has been equally charmed. In just a week of December television appearances, Vermont's junior senator was celebrated by Mike Wallace, Katie Couric, and Larry King. "I salute you," King told Jeffords. Couric, echoing a familiar refrain, described Jeffords as "a man at peace" with his decision. On "60 Minutes," Jeffords declared, "I've never felt better about myself."

You might think Jeffords hasn't a care in the world. Not only is he a media star, but his new Democratic allies supposedly value him in a way the Republicans never did. Didn't the number-two Democrat in the Senate, Harry Reid, give up a precious committee chairmanship to Jeffords back in the spring? Doesn't Tom Daschle, who became Senate majority leader thanks to Jeffords's switch, routinely joke in public that he's just come back from "mowing Jim Jeffords's lawn"? One almost imagines the squinty-eyed Vermonter reclining on a chaise somewhere, as powerful Democrats pop grapes into his mouth and fan him with palm fronds.

The reality is rather different. For all the public appreciation, Jeffords is no more influential now than he was as a Republican—in fact, he may be less so. He has already witnessed the primary cause for which he left the GOP go down in defeat. And a second pet issue is also in serious peril. Gone is the power he once had to extort concessions from Republican leaders fearful of losing his vote; those leaders now despise and shun him. Worse, his Democratic friends may be starting to take him for granted. Indeed, in a recent meeting of House and Senate Democrats, he pronounced himself "the most depressed I have felt" since switching parties.

The single issue most responsible for Jim Jeffords's defection from the GOP was special education—specifically his belief that Republicans weren't spending enough on it. Jeffords has a deep personal investment in the issue: He was one of the principal authors of Congress's 1975 law setting special-education policy for the country. In April, Jeffords briefly managed to help whittle down President Bush's tax cut and add $200 billion in special-ed funding. But when he learned that the final Bush budget plan offered no new education spending at all, Jeffords says, he knew he had to bid the GOP farewell.

But if Jeffords had hoped that aligning himself with the Democrats would achieve his goal, he was mistaken. Special-ed funding came up again during the long negotiations this fall over Congress's sweeping new education bill. After months of haggling, by mid-December House and Senate leaders and the White House had finally reached agreement on nearly every intricate detail of the bill. The only issue left to resolve was special education. Jeffords, with the support of a few liberal Democrats, insisted on the $200 billion he'd failed to get in the Bush budget. But House Republicans—who were both opposed on the merits and eager to punish Jeffords—wouldn't compromise. Jeffords implored his Democratic colleagues to fight, even if it meant stalling the entire bill indefinitely. He even dropped what some took to

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be not-too-subtle hints, reminding people that he had left the GOP over this very issue. (And for an afternoon, a few senators actually wondered if he could possibly do the unthinkable—*switch back*.) But in the end, it was no use. The lead Democratic negotiators, Representative George Miller and Senator Ted Kennedy, with Daschle's support, refused to make a Tora Bora-style stand with Jeffords. Fearing it would be political suicide to derail the bill, the Dems instead promised to revisit funding for special ed next year.

Jeffords's only recourse was to cast a protest vote against the conference report, and to vent his frustration in a *New York Times* op-ed last week: "I am outraged," he wrote, "that a majority of my colleagues on the conference committee"—a number that included several Democrats—"voted not to include this [special-education] amendment." But some Democrats have told Jeffords that he has only himself to blame. Despite his disgust with the Bush tax cut, he did vote *for* it, after all—and intentionally delayed his defection until after it was signed into law. "There's a reason there's no money for [special education]," says one Democrat close to the education talks. "It was the tax bill."

Meanwhile, Jeffords is also encountering trouble on his second-most prized issue: the Northeast Interstate Dairy Compact. The compact, which pays tens of millions in subsidies to Vermont farmers, expired on September 30, and its fate is uncertain. When Jeffords was still a Republican, he managed to keep the compact alive, in part by claiming it was essential to his reelection—and thus to maintaining the GOP Senate majority. Back then, says conservative activist Grover Norquist, "a whole bunch of Republicans were willing to hold their noses and give Jeffords the stupid subsidy." No longer. Now Senate Republicans like Trent Lott, who lost his majority leader post when Jeffords switched, have sworn to block any effort by Daschle to reward the traitor. Indeed, one lobbyist recalls seeing Lott at a Washington dinner this summer and asking about the dairy compact. "His eyes were on fire," the lobbyist recounts. "He grabbed me by the arm and said, 'I will never, *ever* let Jim Jeffords forget what he did to me.'"

JEFFORDS'S PROBLEM IS that Democratic leaders don't feel nearly as much passion on his behalf. On his own, Daschle might give Jeffords his compact, but Midwestern senators who think it provides New England farmers an unfair advantage are pressuring him not to. Daschle may also be nervous about how the compact plays in his home state of South Dakota. "Tom Daschle always says that he represents South Dakota first and is the Democratic leader second," says Norquist, an avowed compact foe. How, Norquist asks, would it look to South Dakota's farmers if Daschle acted against his state's interests in order to reward "some bozo from Vermont"?

That's not to say Democrats haven't tried at all. When Republicans tried to limit farm spending earlier this year, Reid told them that Democrats would scale back their funding demands in exchange for a six-month extension of the compact. Republicans refused. Now Daschle is trying to finesse the issue with a compromise plan that would give $2 billion in subsidies to dairy farmers throughout the country—thereby buying off senators from all regions—over the next three years. One Senate agriculture aide describes that plan, for which Daschle personally twisted arms on the Senate floor last week, as "a little payback" for Jeffords. But it's just a temporary fix—and if that's all he gets, Jeffords says, he'll be disappointed. Again.

Jeffords insists he has at least achieved one political goal: empowering Republican moderates. "I put the moderates back in business, and that alone has made a huge difference," he told *Roll Call* this month. But where's the evidence for that? Yes, Lott created a leadership slot for moderate Senator Arlen Specter after Jeffords's defection, but the Senate Republican agenda shows no signs of enlightenment. And GOP leaders in the House—who are on the verge of promoting Tom DeLay to Majority Leader—haven't even made a pretense of listening to their moderates. If anything, hardliners in both parties wield even more control following Jeffords's switch, since Daschle's Democrats can now wage a fiercer fight against Bush's domestic agenda.

To be sure, Jeffords still knows how to hold out for a good deal now and again. When Senate Democrats were writing their economic stimulus bill this fall, Jeffords—the swing vote needed to pass it out of the Senate Finance Committee—demanded that some $4 billion be shifted from health care to dubious "agricultural stimulus" programs in exchange for his vote. But that's probably less than he would have gotten had he stayed in the GOP. After all, threatening to switch parties is a powerful negotiating tool—but it vanishes as soon as you actually switch. In fact, the more Jeffords loses, the more he falls back on rhetoric about how he "had to be true to what I thought was right, and leave the consequences to sort themselves out." Unfortunately for him, those consequences haven't quite turned out the way he hoped. ■

The lipstick effect wears off.

Replacement Killers

By NOAM SCHEIBER

IF YOU'VE BEEN following domestic news in recent weeks, you've probably heard about the "lipstick effect." As described in such outlets as NBC, *The New York Times*, and *The Wall Street Journal*, the idea is that, during a recession, women substitute small, feel-good items like lipstick for more expensive items like clothing and jewelry. And indeed, between August and October, lipstick sales were up 11 percent over the same period last year.

What you probably haven't heard is that, for a recession, this year's lipstick sales may be somewhat disappointing.

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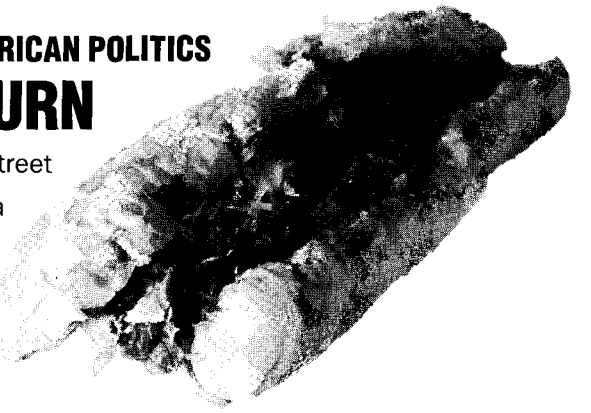
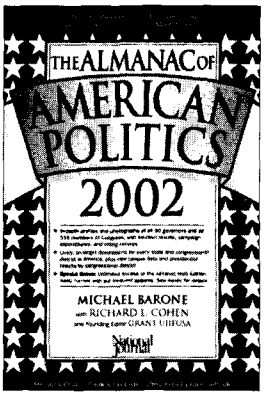


"The 1st runs north on both sides of the Broad Street corridor to include much of black North Philadelphia and south through most of heavily Italian South Philadelphia, where Italian families and their grocery stores and restaurants have been pressed tightly into narrow English and Indian-named streets under a tangle of overhead wires; this is the neighborhood where the various Rockys were filmed and the original Philadelphia cheesesteaks are sold."

—The Almanac of American Politics on Pennsylvania's 1st Congressional District



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While women have been buying lipstick in place of other goods since the economy began heading south, many aren't buying as much lipstick as they used to, regardless of economic circumstances. The reason is that recent product innovations have created a lipstick capable of staying on as long as eight hours—far longer than lipstick lasted as recently as 1995. Thanks to the improved duration, many women are using and replacing their lipstick less frequently than ever before.

And that's not just a problem for Estée Lauder; it's a problem for the entire economy. One reason analysts were optimistic that the current recession would prove short-lived is that they assumed the replacement cycle for many products—i.e., the time that elapses before a product breaks, exhausts itself, or becomes obsolete—was growing shorter and shorter as the rate of innovation in the economy increased. As *U.S. News & World Report* recently observed, "today's [inventory] overhang could prove less enduring than in the downturns of yore." In recent years, for example, the standard replacement cycle for computers has been about three years. With companies having spent a lot of money upgrading their computers in early 1999 in response to Y2K fears, this would seem to portend an imminent recovery in business spending.

Yet as the lipstick example shows, technological innovation can work both ways. Some improvements make a product more powerful—personal computers being the classic example—and thus increase the previous version's rate of obsolescence. But other improvements make a product more durable, and therefore decrease that rate. In the long run, it doesn't really matter which effect predominates. But in a recession, when people defer all but the most essential purchases, the need to replace goods may be about the only thing that keeps them spending. If that need is subsiding, we could be mired in recession for longer than expected.

AT FIRST GLANCE, it seems strange that companies would make their products last progressively longer. Indeed, for years, conspiracy theorists and armchair economists have peddled the theory of "planned obsolescence," wherein companies deliberately introduce flaws into their products to force consumers to replace them more often. (Everyone remembers the kid in their freshman dorm who insisted that Ford designed cars to last five years even though it knew how to make them run forever.)

But professional economists have never entirely bought that logic. They point out that companies can simply charge more for longer-lasting products. A consumer who pays $1 for a light bulb that lasts six months should be willing to pay $2 for a bulb that lasts one year. Likewise, if a buyer knows she can sell her Escort in five years for half the purchase price, there's no good reason Ford shouldn't build it to last ten years and simply double that price. As long as it's cheaper for GE or Ford to produce one high-quality product rather than two inferior ones—and usually it is—it would be irrational for them not to. As *Slate.com*'s Steve Landsburg has pointed out, just about the only time companies actually engage in planned obsolescence is when consumers demand it—for example, women who prefer to spend a couple of dollars on panty hose every few weeks rather than buying one expensive pair each year.

In fact, competition may compel companies to make higher-quality products even in cases where they won't ultimately recoup their costs. Go back to the lipstick example. When cosmetic companies realized women wanted longer-lasting lipstick, they devoted their research and development budgets to making it. After all, the first company to score a breakthrough could expand its market share while raising its prices. But, before long, almost every cosmetic maker was producing longer-lasting lipstick, which should have lowered the price and reduced profits for everyone.

And it's not just lipstick. The same thing has been happening with many of the products that wear out or get used up over time. Take automobiles. Thanks in part to competition from Japanese car manufacturers, American cars now last longer than ever before. Today it's not at all unusual for a car to last upwards of 200,000 miles. Americans have responded by keeping their cars longer. In 1989 the average age of cars in the United States was 6.5 years. By 2000, despite the economic boom of the late 1990s and the surge in demand for brand new SUVs, the average age had risen to 8.3 years.

THE AUTO PARTS and equipment market tells a similar story. Just about every innovation in the tire industry over the last decade has decreased demand: Tires last thousands of miles longer; all-weather tires have made snow tires unnecessary; the fact that many tires can now operate without air for 50 miles is making spares obsolete. Replacement parts have been hit equally hard. Last year an official from Tenneco Automotive, the company that manufactures the Monroe and Walker brands of shock absorbers and mufflers, told the *Chicago Tribune* that increased auto part durability had shrunk the replacement market by 10 percent.

And manufacturers of other big-ticket consumer items aren't faring much better. The Association of Home Appliance Manufacturers estimates that between 1990 and 2001, the average age of major home appliances increased across the board: freezers from 10.7 years to 11.7 years, trash compactors from 7.2 to 11.1, washing machines from 7.3 to 7.7, dryers from 7.9 to 8.5, microwaves from 4.9 to 7.7, and dishwashers from 6.6 to 7.2. That's especially remarkable when you consider two developments that should have compressed those spreads. First, as with other goods, people tend to keep their appliances longer during a recession and to replace them during an expansion—and we've just come off a ten-year expansion. Second, people tend to buy appliances when they move into a new house, something Americans did at unprecedented rates during the late '90s.

In an effort to deal with these increasing life spans, executives at companies like Whirlpool and GE recently decided to integrate information technology into their products. In a couple of years, for example, consumers will be able to purchase what Electrolux Chief Executive Michael Treschow calls the "Smart Fridge," which features a computer screen and Internet access right there on the venerable refrigerator

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door. A former Merrill Lynch analyst named Justin Maurer has even suggested that these high-tech knickknacks could permanently winnow the replacement cycle for household appliances to three years. But the sheer stupidity of this gambit is tough to ignore—who wants to surf the Web from their refrigerator? "The whole thing with Internet appliances is far-fetched," concedes Nicholas Heymann, a veteran appliance-industry watcher for Prudential Securities.

As it happens, it's not even clear that replacement cycles are still shrinking for high-tech products like mobile phones, personal computers, and hand-held digital organizers. That's because the rate of improvement is so rapid that it has outpaced consumers' ability to make use of it. Take personal computers, which have become faster and more powerful every year for 20 years. For a while, that improved performance made it worthwhile to replace a computer every few years. But now personal computers are so fast and powerful that the average user—someone mostly interested in word processing and Internet access—has little need to upgrade. As a result, according to University of North Carolina marketing Professor Barry Bayus, the rate at which computers become obsolete isn't increasing, and may even be falling. Mobile-phone manufacturers, who had also hoped technological obsolescence would drive sales, have been equally disappointed: Features like text-messaging and Internet service just haven't registered with many consumers. As the *Financial Times* reported last month, because most people initially purchased phones as "an essential business tool or reassuring emergency means of communication ... [t]here are few compelling services to encourage users to upgrade."

WHAT DOES ALL this mean for the economy? The Department of Commerce breaks down consumer spending, which stood at nearly $7 trillion last year, into three categories: durable goods (like cars and computers); nondurable goods (like food and clothing); and services (everything from hospital visits to vacation travel). Services, at about $4 trillion, is by far the largest category. But the replacement cycle for services barely changes over time: People get their hair cut when it gets too long, and there is very little technology can do to speed up that process. Much of the $2 trillion we spend on nondurables isn't particularly susceptible to changes in technology either: People buy food—about $1 trillion each year—when the cupboard is empty. (Clothing expenditures, which stood at about $275 billion last year, are a slightly different matter, but they tend to be governed by fashion rather than durability.)

That leaves the portion of nondurables we replace when they wear out (think lipstick), and durable goods, which tend to break down or become obsolete. In all, this amounts to almost $1.5 trillion in spending each year, or about 15 percent of the economy. But it's that 15 percent that drives much of the typical business cycle. As Johns Hopkins University economist Chris Carroll puts it, changes in durable spending tell "most of the story for spending in recessions."

To be sure, there are some products in this group whose replacement cycles are decreasing. According to an annual survey by *Appliance* magazine, innovations in consumer electronics, like VCRs and CD players, seem to be inducing people to upgrade more frequently. But consumer electronics only make up about $70 billion of that $1.5 trillion. Much more imposing is the nearly $400 billion accounted for by automobiles, parts, and household appliances—that is, the very products for which the replacement cycle is, in many cases, growing.

Of course, consumers don't buy new products only when their old ones are spent. Marketers have long exploited fashion consciousness as a way of creating demand. And people will always be willing to upgrade if the price is low enough. (Witness the recent surge in car sales, where zero-percent financing effectively bumped thousands of dollars off sticker prices.) But, as the pessimistic projections for next year's auto sales suggest, replacement sales are still an important factor in consumer spending, particularly during a recession. As long as that's the case, anyone counting on consumers to jump-start our sputtering economy may be in for a wait. ■

Kandahar Dispatch

Game Theory

By ELIZABETH RUBIN

"THE GAME IS so large that one sees but a little at a time," said Mahbub Ali, the Afghan horse trader and occasional British agent, advising patience to Rudyard Kipling's Kim, who was hungrily learning the spy trade at the height of the Great Game between Russia and England. It is wise counsel these days in Afghanistan, where the last days of Taliban rule have brought forth an avalanche of political intrigue, much of it utterly opaque to those unfamiliar with this decimated land.

A few weeks ago an Afghan friend of mine was sitting in a town near Kabul, writing seemingly innocent lines on pieces of paper—permissions granted for petrol, guns, cars—on behalf of his illiterate friend, a commander with the Northern Alliance. Three weeks later I ran into him again, this time in Kandahar. I call him Sami, short for Samiullah, though he's assumed an assortment of names over the years as his identities have changed—Taliban Acting Intelligence Minister, man on the run, rug merchant. Now I learned that some of those letters weren't as innocent as they seemed; Sami was informing various mujahedin and Taliban commanders in the provinces surrounding Kabul of a plot to sabotage Afghanistan's new government. "My Dear Friend," the letters began, "I would like to inform you about the international imperialism and Western-style government that THEY are bringing to our country. America and Western countries want to bring back the former king. It is our oblig-

ELIZABETH RUBIN is covering the war in Afghanistan for THE NEW REPUBLIC.

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ation to Islam to prohibit their activities. We will try to make a real mujahedin government inside Afghanistan. Now you must keep control of your areas, find artillery and weapons. If you need some materials from our side, just inform me and I will cooperate with you.... God will help us and I will inform you by letter again of your orders and our program."

So my friend is a fundamentalist, a militant anti-American who hopes to restore something like Taliban rule, right? Well, not exactly. Sami says he doesn't believe what he writes in those letters at all; in fact, he considers the king's return to be Afghanistan's only hope. So why did he write them? Because Sami has enough experience working with the Taliban, being jailed by the Taliban, pursued by the Taliban, and forgiven by the Taliban to know the importance of befriending one's enemies. He's playing both sides, keeping his options open in case the tide swings back the other way, leaving both his enemies and his friends guessing. In other words, he's playing politics in Afghanistan.

SAMI IS PASHTUN, and his clan is the Populzai, the same as Hamid Karzai's. His clansmen are Taliban and anti-Taliban, and like everyone here they deal in tribal negotiations and in cash. Right now they are negotiating with, and extorting from, the newest and most powerful tribe in this region that stretches from Kandahar to the non-border with Pakistan: the Americans.

Clad in black wool caps, the Americans are dropping money into the economy, buying generators and spare parts. They're encamped in the house of the governor, Gul Agha Shirzai, who is flush with Afghan notes supplied, everyone says, by Americans. Some Americans have also camped out in the guest house in Mullah Omar's lavish but bombed-out palace, which Hamid Karzai has made his Kandahar base. They're installed at the airport, where two days ago two sick, hungry Al Qaeda foot soldiers crawled out of a hole. (The Afghan soldiers keeping watch beat them and discovered about 60 more in unknown underground hideouts.) FBI agents are building a high-security prison at the airport to hold Al Qaeda and top-level Taliban both for interrogation and to prevent the uprising that ended so bloodily last month in Mazar-e-Sharif. The Americans are learning how this all works. One officer told his men to be careful not to shoot anti-Taliban fighters, that if they meet armed Taliban they should simply take their guns, send them home, and tell them the war is over. And be sure not to fire at Afghans shooting fireworks to celebrate the end of Ramadan.

"We just hope the Americans don't leave us now or we won't be able to defend ourselves," one of Sami's cousins, a dark-haired, chubby mujahedin named Jumai Gul, told me. "If they go, the Taliban will be back in one week." He'd grown fond of the Americans as they fought the Taliban together in the mountains around Kandahar. One of them had given him a pair of green goggles that he kept in his bedroom. "He was an older guy, with yellowish hair," he said. They'd eaten together, talked by hand gestures. Then one night the Al Qaeda and Taliban soldiers on the other side of the river advanced, he said, to within 400 meters. "It was nighttime and we were all confused. They came on our side. We went on theirs. We couldn't surrender because we knew they'd kill us. And the Americans in the sky didn't know we were Karzai forces." That's when his American friend died. "He was killed by the American bombs." Jumai Gul still had shrapnel in his thigh from the attack, and still carried in his pocket a folded-up reward flier with a picture of Osama bin Laden and his right-hand man, the Egyptian Ayman al-Zawahiri, with a promise of $25 million from America.

ONE NIGHT I took a long, rocky journey out of Kandahar with Sami's cousin, a well-known commander named Shawali Khan, who is based near the Kandahar airport. He's a jolly pasha of a man who looks like a drawing out of a child's *Arabian Nights*—he has a lion's mane black beard, thick eyebrows, a blue gown embroidered with silver flowing over his enormous torso, and he walks in a cloud of rose oil perfume. He eats too much, smokes too much, spits and burps too much. He commands a force of more than 200 soldiers, including his brother Jumai Gul. We stopped at a village where the Americans had accidentally bombed themselves, and paid a visit to Shawali Khan's cousin, a former powerful Taliban commander named Mullah Azam. The mullah's father, an old, white-bearded man in a white gown and white turban, was reclining in his mud hut with a gaslight. He told us that his son was sleeping and still fasting, though Ramadan had just ended. "He's angry and afraid," someone else in the room said.

Mullah Azam is a typical Talib. He grew up in a *madrassa*, and believes in no other form of education. He was a fearless fighter and powerful commander at the Bagram front lines north of Kabul. Last year bin Laden invited him to his base, promised cooperation, forces, supplies. In these last months he was pursued by American planes as he drove his truck with no lights from post to post under the night sky. Now Mullah Azam is the ward of his cousin Shawali Khan, to whom he forfeited his shiny red Toyota pickup.

As we sat with his father, he bounded bravely into the room, ready for a fight. "We'll still destroy you," he said to Shawali Khan, the only man who can protect him from prison or worse.

"IF YOU WERE a Muslim, you wouldn't support Karzai because he's receiving aid from the U.S. All the non-Muslims are uniting against us and we must support pan-Islamism," Mullah Azam said to Shawali Khan's brother, Jumai Gul, the next day. By then we were in Shawali Khan's village—a compound with two family houses, two guest houses, and a cow shed—in the desert mountains. Then, in the middle of our conversation, Mullah Azam suddenly clammed up and said he'd never had anything to do with the Arabs and was only a Taliban commander. Jumai Gul became furious. "Why don't you tell the truth," he shouted in a high wail. "You were with Arabs for seven years and know everything about Al Qaeda and bin Laden—tell them the truth. It's clear to all of us that all the power belonged to the Arabs." Then he said to me, "He joined the Taliban because they gave him lots of money."

"I will never speak about Al Qaeda's ideology," the mullah

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said, and lit a cigarette.

"And why are you smoking?" Jumai Gul asked with a laugh. Unlike chewing tobacco, in which everyone here indulges, cigarettes were supposedly prohibited by the Taliban. "Because I'm unhappy and saw all my cars being driven by the Northern Alliance." At which point Sami whispered to me: "There's no ideology. Shawali protects him because he's our relative, and because he's given him all his cars!"

Mullah Azam had given Shawali Khan more than that. Two months ago Shawali Khan was captured by the Taliban. "They locked the door for three days, interrogated me, and decided to execute me." Though Shawali Khan had fought through Russian ambushes and survived an earlier Taliban imprisonment, this time he saw no way out. Mullah Azam heard of his cousin's plight, and he informed a bigger Talib. The big Talib, Mullah Rahmatullah, whom Shawali Khan had once saved, purchased Shawali Khan's freedom for ten long guns and 100,000 Pakistani rupees—approximately $1,600.

Now, in just a matter of weeks, they've exchanged fates. Two days ago Mullah Rahmatullah was captured by Governor Gul Agha's men in Kandahar and interrogated in prison; it was Shawali Khan's turn to bargain and wheedle him out of prison. And now Shawali Khan is driving Mullah Azam's big truck, collecting his vehicles and weapons—and protecting him.

There's an old Pashtun proverb, Sami told me, that goes something like this: "A cousin is good against another tribe. A brother is good against cousins. And a son is good against brothers." Which is why if you don't give birth to a son here in Pashtunwali land, you're as good as finished. "All your assets will go to your enemy," said Sami, who has only four daughters. And who's the enemy? Your cousin.

ONE MORNING, RELATIVES from neighboring villages, Taliban and anti-Taliban, arrived for Eid al-Fitr and gathered over cups of tea and small dishes of sweets and nuts. Shawali Khan presided, giving out Afghan notes and discussing how to get more Taliban cars. Two men sat next to each other, one wrapped in a shiny black turban, the other in a shiny white turban. The black turban was happy and laughing. The white turban had a long, grim face. The black said of the white: "He made our lives so hard." The white said: "The Taliban gave us money so we joined them. I am Taliban but I was also mujahed and fought the Russians." He pulled up his pant leg to show his scar. When I asked about the color of their turbans, everyone laughed. "When Karzai came we changed white for black like we used in the mujahedin time," said the black turban. "But this one only has white ones and can't buy a new one because the Taliban leader who was funding him is in hiding." The room trembled with giggles.

When I asked how they made a living, the black turban said, "Now we are happy. The Taliban forbid us to grow our opium last year. But now Hamid Karzai told us we can smoke and drink and everything will be 'broad-based,'" he laughed, riffing on the overused catchphrase for Afghanistan's future "broad-based" government. "So last month we planted our opium again. If we had other agriculture we wouldn't grow it, but we need the money," he said. After nine months he would harvest it and smuggle it to Iran. Someone in the room said: "Don't talk about the opium or the Americans will come and forbid it." But the black turban was too pleased about the future too care. "We send it to Europe and America," he confessed, "because you are the superpowers and have big money."

As the gathering broke up we climbed up the rocky knoll behind the kraal to the family graveyard. One blue-painted raised tomb stood out from the rest, telling the family's story of *badal*, retaliation, one of the cornerstones of Pashtun society. It read, "Welcome to the Martyr's grave," and noted the Islamic date on which he died 13 months before. "The cruel people martyred him and we pray his spirit will be alive and we will pursue his enemy until we kill him." It was Shawali Khan's uncle, a former leader of the family and enemy of the Taliban, who'd been gunned down by family enemies loyal to the Taliban. The cause was an old land dispute that stretches back to the time when Shawali Khan's father was orphaned and this family of the same tribe captured their lands. Each time the political winds changed, the other family would rise to power and wrestle back the land. "It's our national right to hunt his enemies who were Taliban," said Shawali Khan's father, now the elder of the village. "First we'll kill the man who made the plan, then those who executed him. After we've taken our revenge we can send a delegation to solve the problem."

Shawali Khan's father was on his way out to settle the dispute of another family down the road, where two brothers were nearly killing each other because one went to the bazaar and brought back material, but no thread, to make clothes. As he left he said, "We have a proverb. Someone took his revenge after one hundred years. And another said, 'You did it so fast? Why didn't you wait a little time?'" The idea being that the longer you wait, the clearer the situation will be.

GOLDEN RAYS WERE falling on the mountains, and Shawali Khan decided to drive us into the desert to one of Afghanistan's most popular pilgrimage sites, Baba Nikke, which the Taliban vainly tried to ban as idolatrous. When we arrived he smoked a hash cigarette, stepped out of his shoes, and wandered into the grounds, which are centered on a sacred, multi-trunked tree, now festooned with pilgrims' offerings—rams' horns, goat bones, bits of cloth, tea cups. He prayed, kissed the Koran and its wooden stand inside the prayer room. It's a place of legends and a place where "possessed" women are brought to be cured of their demons or to die.

The desert shapes were fading under shades of rusty light left behind by the sun. As we left, Shawali Khan, in his great gown and rose oil perfume, asked me if I'd facilitate some contacts with the Americans he'd fought alongside in the mountains last week. Apparently there was some internal Populzai friction and he wasn't assured of Karzai's financial support. "Everyone needs a foreign sponsor," someone said, "otherwise you are nothing here now." Shawali Khan's own general commander had just returned from Iran, where

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he'd spent the last year in exile. And the ex-Taliban Mullah Rahmatullah claimed that a former Taliban acting foreign minister has just opened an office in Quetta so that when Zahir Shah returns, the Taliban in waiting will launch their activities against him on Pakistan's behalf. And so the centrifugal game begins again. And the players are pretty much the same: monarchists, fundamentalists, nationalists, hopeful democrats, illiterate pawns. And the big players: Americans, Russians, Iranians, Pakistanis, Indians. "If the Americans abandon us like they did last time when the Russians retreated, it will be our doom," said Sami. "We will never survive another civil war." ■

What the FBI is doing wrong.

Police Blotter

By JASON ZENGERLE

Of all the criticism John Ashcroft has received for his counterterrorism efforts, none has seemed so damning as the brickbats thrown his way on the front page of *The Washington Post* on November 28. There, under the banner headline "EX-FBI OFFICIALS CRITICIZE TACTICS ON TERRORISM," eight former bureau officials (including former Director William Webster) laid into Ashcroft—not for trampling civil liberties, but for devising a stupid plan. Ashcroft's counterterrorism strategy, former FBI assistant director Kenneth P. Walton acidly told the *Post*, was straight out of "the Perry Mason School of Law Enforcement, where you get them in there and they confess. Well it just doesn't work that way."

The *Post* article nicely framed the debate over how the FBI can best prevent terrorist attacks. On one side are the former officials quoted in the *Post*—whose views are shared by some agents still in the bureau—who favor what had been, until September 11, the FBI's counterterrorism strategy of nearly two decades. That strategy resembled the one the FBI uses to fight organized crime: Relying on electronic surveillance and human informants, the bureau conducted long-term investigations of suspected terrorist cells before making any arrests. That way the FBI could identify all the members of a terrorist cell and learn all the details of that cell's plot before they shut it down. "The idea is to let things get down to the last stage and then step in so you make sure you get everyone involved," explains one former agent. "You don't want anyone slipping away."

On the other side are Ashcroft and new FBI Director Robert Mueller who, in light of September 11, have dropped the old watch-and-wait strategy in favor of an aggressive dragnet approach, arresting and jailing "suspected terrorists" using any immigration or unrelated criminal charges they can find. The Justice Department is also trying to conduct informational interviews with 5,000 Middle Eastern men who have entered the United States over the past two years, and Ashcroft reportedly hopes to relax restrictions on the FBI's surveillance of religious and political organizations in the United States. "Our single objective," the attorney general has explained, "is to prevent terrorist attacks by taking suspected terrorists off the streets."

There's just one problem with this debate: Neither side has a good answer for how to defend the nation against Al Qaeda-style terrorism. For all the talk about the relative merits of long-term investigations versus short-term disruptions, none of the methods and techniques promoted by either side in the counterterrorism debate would have prevented the September 11 attacks. Indeed, the challenge the FBI now faces in battling Al Qaeda—with its decentralized structure of tightly knit, highly autonomous, virtually anonymous cells—likely can't be solved by traditional law enforcement tactics. If the FBI hopes to prevent future attacks by the Osama bin Laden network, it must expand its cooperation with foreign law enforcement agencies—which it has already begun to do—and commit itself to the kind of strategic intelligence that could help predict attacks—which it hasn't. Overnight, fighting Al Qaeda-style terrorism has become the FBI's number-one goal. But so far, it is a goal that neither the bureau nor its internal critics are ready to achieve.

The key to preventing terrorism is always knowledge. "You can't prevent anything unless you have some scintilla of information that it's going to happen," says Oliver "Buck" Revell, a former FBI executive assistant director who helped craft the bureau's old counterterrorism strategy. In the 1970s and early 1980s, the country suffered a rash of terrorist attacks: Puerto Rican separatists—like the Macheteros and the FALN—set off bombs around New York City and pulled off a string of armored-car robberies; New Left groups—like the May 19th Communist organization and the United Freedom Front—carried out bomb attacks against targets up and down the East Coast. And so in 1982 the FBI made counterterrorism one of its four national priorities (along with foreign counterintelligence, organized crime, and white-collar crime). One year later Attorney General William French Smith issued new guidelines—revising those issued by Attorney General Ed Levi in the wake of Watergate—that gave the FBI more leeway in conducting domestic intelligence investigations: Now, instead of probable cause, the bureau only needed to show a "reasonable indication" of a domestic security threat

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to open an investigation.

In its new counterterrorism campaign, the FBI was operating, from an information-gathering perspective, in a target-rich environment. In the '80s and '90s most terrorists planning attacks in the United States were tied to larger political or cultural movements (the New Left and Puerto Rican separatists), or to foreign governments such as Libya and Iraq. Consequently, the FBI had a good idea where to look for terrorist activity. And once the information came in—providing the "trip wire," as former FBI agent Robert Heibel, who did counterterrorism in the '80s, calls it—the bureau would spring into action. "It was like hounds going after the hare," says Heibel.

Sometimes the trip wire came from human informants. In 1983, for example, the FBI prevented a FALN terrorist cell in Chicago from committing a string of armed robberies and prison breakouts thanks to information from another FALN member the bureau had flipped a few years earlier. New Left groups were also relatively easy places from which to recruit informants—and since, in accord with Leninist principles, the groups were structured hierarchically with tight central control, when the bureau arrested the top guy, the rest of the organization often crumbled. What's more, many New Left terrorists were meticulous record keepers: "They all thought they were going to write the book about the Revolution," says Heibel; in sniffing out one plot, the bureau often found clues to several more.

In other instances electronic surveillance did the trick: In 1990, during the run-up to the Gulf war, the FBI monitored calls to the Iraqi Embassy, one of which came from a Jordanian immigrant living in New Jersey who offered to commit terrorist attacks on behalf of Saddam Hussein. No one at the embassy, which had recently suffered a severe staff reduction, was interested; but the FBI followed up, sending an agent posing as an Iraqi intelligence officer to meet with the man, who revealed his plans to blow up the Holland Tunnel and two military installations. After further surveillance to see if the man had any compatriots—he didn't—he was arrested. It was one of many successes: Between 1981 and 2000, the FBI prevented 131 terrorist attacks.

But September 11 changed everything—not least counterterrorism policy. Faced with an apparent threat of unprecedented danger and immediacy, Ashcroft abandoned the FBI's traditional practice of long-term investigations in favor of a new policy of disruption, relying on an aggressive dragnet. (Technically this was the FBI director's decision; but Mueller, who had been in his job only one week on September 11, works unusually closely with—and his critics inside the bureau say is unusually subservient to—the attorney general.) While Ashcroft compared his new counterterrorism strategy to Robert Kennedy's campaign against organized crime, the analogy is bogus. As one former Justice Department official quips, when the FBI was going after organized crime, "it wasn't rounding up everyone in Little Italy, putting them in jail, and then figuring out what to charge them with."

The problems with Ashcroft's strategy, as articulated by his many critics, are straightforward. Even leaving aside civil-liberties concerns, the dragnet approach wastes valuable man-hours on thousands of suspects who will ultimately prove innocent; engenders resentment in the very Arab and Muslim communities whose cooperation investigators need; and, most of all, alerts any terrorists not caught in the initial roundup to go underground. But given the danger of further attacks in the immediate aftermath of September 11, the

CHRISTOPHE VORLET

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dragnet approach—with its premium on getting suspected terrorists off the street and disrupting any ongoing terrorist plots—was probably the right one.

Moreover, Ashcroft's efforts represent a less clear break with past approaches to counterterrorism than his critics maintain. The interviews with recent Middle Eastern immigrants, and efforts to loosen guidelines on surveillance of religious buildings, suggest that the FBI has not lost sight of the value of information. According to one former Justice Department official familiar with counterterrorism efforts since September 11, the bureau is also desperately trying to build up contacts and recruit potential informants in Muslim communities throughout the country. "They're spending a lot of time sending agents out to the local mosque, saying, 'Hi, I'm Special Agent Fred Smith, let's talk,'" says the former official.

The real problem is that neither strategy is likely to work against Al Qaeda in the longer term. Ashcroft's dragnet is largely a holding strategy—eventually most of those in custody will have to be released; and terrorists who avoided capture in the days after September 11 will eventually resurface. But the old-school infiltration method is insufficient as well.

IT'S TRUE THAT after two successful operations by proto-Al Qaeda cells in New York-area mosques associated with the blind Egyptian cleric Sheik Omar Abdel Rahman (the 1990 assassination in New York of Meir Kahane and the first World Trade Center bombing in 1993), the FBI infiltrated Abdel Rahman's organization in 1993, ultimately preventing another plot to blow up landmarks in New York and sending Abdel Rahman and ten others to prison. But Al Qaeda seems to have learned several lessons from that FBI success. The first is to avoid mosques or other identifiably Islamic associations. A terrorist training manual found last year on the computer of a suspected Al Qaeda member in Manchester, England, advised: "[H]ave a general appearance that does not indicate Islamic orientation.... Be careful not to mention ... common expressions ... [such as], 'May Allah reward you,' [or] 'Peace be upon you,' while arriving and departing.... Avoid visiting famous Islamic places (mosques, libraries, Islamic fairs, etc.)." Indeed, of the 19 September 11 hijackers, it appears that only two attended a mosque in the United States; and they apparently did not reveal anything about their plans to their fellow worshipers.

Another lesson Al Qaeda apparently learned from the FBI's 1993 success is decentralization and compartmentalization. Most of the September 11 hijackers knew only a handful of their compatriots; the cells did not come together until the moment before the plot was executed. What's more, the full extent of the plot was known to only a handful of the hijackers—those who had taken flight training. This structure followed the training manual, which recommended an operation "composed of many cells whose members do not know one another, so that if a cell member is caught the other cells would not be affected, and work would proceed normally." In other words, the September 11 plot was virtually undetectable. "Even if they'd been aggressive in covering groups I know about, they might not have picked up these guys," says a former FBI official. "If we're talking about a small, tight-knit organization that doesn't go outside its own circle, that's tough."

Consider the extreme fortuitousness of the FBI's greatest counterterrorist success against Al Qaeda: thwarting the plan to blow up Los Angeles International Airport during the millennium celebrations. The trip wire that prevented that attack came only when, on December 14, 1999, an alert customs inspector in Port Angeles, Washington, stopped an Algerian national, Ahmed Ressam, with a trunk full of explosives as he crossed into the United States from Canada. Only after catching Ressam red-handed did authorities learn that he was part of an Al Qaeda cell in Montreal. The FBI's subsequent Operation Borderbom—a mad, two-week scramble to head off other millennium attacks—resulted in dozens of detentions and arrests. But the FBI still cannot say for certain whether any other planned attacks were in the works. And Ressam, now awaiting sentencing and cooperating with American authorities, has reportedly been of little help in identifying Al Qaeda cells besides his own.

SO HOW CAN the FBI gather information that will prevent future Al Qaeda attacks? Or, as Kevin Giblin, chief of the FBI's Counterterrorism Threat Assessment and Warning Unit, puts it, "How do you find these very anonymous, capital-A anonymous, cells?"

One answer is for the bureau to work much more closely with foreign law enforcement and intelligence agencies. While Al Qaeda cells in the United States might not rely on support networks in this country, they may seek assistance abroad. Last week's indictment of Zacarias Moussaoui, for instance, states that the September 11 hijackers, once in the United States, received money transfers from Al Qaeda operatives in Germany and the United Arab Emirates. Intelligence officials estimate there are Al Qaeda cells in at least 60 countries, with the largest and most active located in Western Europe. The September 11 plot itself likely originated in Hamburg; and more than one dozen men suspected of playing direct or indirect roles in the attack have been detained in Europe.

Fortunately, over the past ten years, the FBI has dramatically expanded its global reach, doubling the number of FBI offices—known as legal attaches, or "legats"—in foreign countries. Those 44 legats have laid the groundwork for increased cooperation between the FBI and foreign law enforcement. "The legats have liaisons with foreign intelligence agencies, they know people on a first-name basis," explains former FBI agent Clint Van Zandt. "Instead of trying to broker these introductions in the heat of the battle, we're now past the mating dances in close to fifty different countries." And since September 11, this familiarity has paid off: The Moussaoui indictment probably wouldn't have been possible without the assistance of German authorities; and a number of the arrests of terror suspects in Europe since September 11 have resulted from joint investigations with the FBI. Last week Ashcroft and a handful of senior FBI officials went to Europe to meet with police officials in Britain, Spain, Germany, and Italy. Now if authorities in

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Milan discover that a suspected Al Qaeda member has wired money to someone in the United States, the FBI will likely know about it and can begin its own investigation here. "Since so much of this originates overseas," explains one former FBI official, "we're going to be extremely dependent on foreign agencies for information."

BUT THERE'S SOMETHING else the FBI has to do to gather good information on Al Qaeda, and here, unfortunately, the bureau still hasn't gotten the message. The FBI excels at what is called "tactical" intelligence. Focusing on the little picture, FBI intelligence analysts work closely with agents on the day-to-day necessities of law enforcement investigations—compiling evidence to support an agent's wiretap requests or, with the help of databases, helping an agent match a person to a particular address. For special events, like the Super Bowl or the Olympics, analysts will draw up "threat assessments" for local police. "What drives our analysts is the operational support we provide to the investigation," says Giblin.

In the 1990s some inside the FBI thought the bureau should begin doing more "strategic" intelligence—the big-picture work that is the forte of analysts at the CIA. "We needed to be like the CIA in certain areas," says one former FBI official. "We wanted to create a mechanism in the FBI that looked at long-term intelligence and made predictions about what was going to happen." But this effort never really got off the ground, in part because of a lack of funding, and in part because of an institutional unwillingness to enter the strategic area. "We're not the Federal Bureau of Analysis," says Giblin. Indeed, the FBI's investigative services division—created in the late '90s as part of the bureau's fledgling effort to produce strategic intelligence—was eliminated earlier this month when Mueller, as part of the post-September 11 shake-up, reorganized the bureau.

This is a shame, because if the FBI ever needed strategic intelligence, it's right now. (While the CIA may have analysts capable of producing good strategic intelligence, their focus is, understandably, on helping the agency accomplish its goals overseas, not assisting the FBI with its domestic security concerns.) To be sure, intelligence analysts are not infallible—and the FBI's fledgling investigative services division, before it was disbanded, did not exactly distinguish itself. But good analysts can sift through huge amounts of information—gathered from human assets, electronic surveillance, public sources, and previous investigations—and spot patterns that allow them to make predictions. And in the FBI's case, those predictions could help drive investigations, spotting new areas to target in a hunt for information—areas that, with a group like Al Qaeda, are often few and far between.

Consider the September 11 attacks—attacks that were seemingly impossible for the FBI to detect ahead of time. A smart intelligence analyst, looking at emerging trends in Islamist terrorism, might have predicted that terrorists would try to hijack airplanes and crash them into buildings. After all, September 11 may have been the first time terrorists carried out the strategy successfully, but it was not the first time they tried it. In 1994 hijackers from the Armed Islamic Group—which is affiliated with Al Qaeda—hijacked an Air France jet in Algiers and apparently planned to crash it into the Eiffel Tower, but failed when French commandos stormed the plane when it stopped for refueling. In 1995 Filipino authorities detected a Manila-based Al Qaeda cell's plan to blow up eleven American airliners in mid-flight and crash a twelfth into the CIA headquarters. (Unlike previous terrorists, who hijacked commercial airplanes because they wanted to take hostages and then use those hostages as bargaining chips in negotiations, Al Qaeda, with its fixation on inflicting heavy casualties, views airplanes as weapons of mass destruction.) With that terrorist m.o. in mind, and recognizing that the plot would only work if one of the terrorists involved could fly a jetliner, the analyst might have advised agents to keep an eye on flight schools that offered such training. At the very least, a good analyst—thinking along these lines—might have raised alarm bells at FBI headquarters in August when agents from the Minneapolis field office began investigating Moussaoui, whose suspicious behavior had led his instructors at a Minnesota flight school to contact the bureau. The Minneapolis agents had arrested Moussaoui on an immigration violation and—after getting a lead from French intelligence that he had ties to bin Laden—had asked headquarters in Washington for permission to seek a national security search warrant that would allow them go through Moussaoui's computer. But FBI lawyers denied the request for a search that might have tipped off the bureau to the September 11 plot.

THAT SCENARIO, OF COURSE, has all the benefit of hindsight. But there are other examples of how intelligence analysts can make educated guesses about where and how terrorists might attack next. One intelligence analyst who favors this one-step-ahead-of-the-terrorists approach (and who does not work for the FBI) notes two recent attacks by Kashmiri separatist groups believed to be affiliated with Al Qaeda. In October, Jaish-e-Mohammad terrorists set off a car bomb outside the Jammu and Kashmir state legislative assembly; last week terrorists from the same group, possibly joined by terrorists from the Lashkar-e-Toiba organization, stormed the Indian parliament building in New Delhi. The analyst thinks the FBI should start preparing for the possibility that terrorists might attack state capitols in the United States. "They should be ready for when a car pulls up, seven guys jump out with grenades and explosives, and they rush into the Nebraska legislature," says the analyst. "You need people who can think outside the box ... who have imagination and aren't just paper pushers," the analyst adds. "A good analyst can't be a dullard."

Efforts to develop a post-September 11 counterterrorism strategy are still in their initial stages, and it is too early to assess their effectiveness with any certainty. For their part, Ashcroft and Mueller say they are fairly sure that their recent campaign has prevented other terrorist attacks. But, as Ashcroft conceded in late November, "Frankly, we cannot know which acts of terrorism we have deferred, how many we've prevented." Unless the FBI changes strategy, he probably never will. ■

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Stanley Kauffmann on Films

Promises, Promises

HERE IS AN English manor house with a rather unusual staff. Alan Bates is the butler, Helen Mirren the housekeeper, and Eileen Atkins the head cook. Richard E. Grant is the first footman, Derek Jacobi the master's valet, Emily Watson the head housemaid. Of course there are numerous other servants. A weekend shooting party is in progress—it is 1932—and abovestairs, too, are unusual folk: Michael Gambon, the manorial master, Kristin Scott Thomas, his wife, and such guests as Maggie Smith, a countess; Charles Dance, a lord; Jeremy Northam as the then-famous actor-playwright-composer Ivor Novello, and Bob Balaban as a visiting Hollywood producer.

What a promising feast. But it turns out to be Barmecidal. **Gosford Park** (USA) runs one hundred thirty-seven minutes and spends two-thirds of that time introducing the many characters and providing a snippet of tease about each that is supposed to make him or her interesting. But during that long stretch all that really holds us is the bombardment by this high-powered cast—so many distinguished actors as hosts and guests being served by other distinguished actors as staff. The very shine of the cast, more than the smart talk of the upstairs folk and the gritty talk of the staff, leads us to expect big doings. Such actors, we think, must have been assembled for something extraordinary. We wait and we wait. Then, after we have been around stately Gosford Park many times, as if we were searching for the beginning of the story, the huge star-studded contraption dwindles into a trite murder mystery. And even that mystery is poorly handled. There has been no suspense, no worry about crime; it simply happens. After another good while, we get the explanation, wordily. Then, like the house guests, we depart.

For naught have we been reminded of *The Shooting Party* and *Remains of the Day*. For naught have we been applying what in billiards is called body English to this English tale, trying to make it tilt into some drama, some significance. It simply disintegrates.

The original idea (rarely have those two words been more misused) came from Robert Altman, who directed, and Bob Balaban, who probably thought up the Hollywood role for himself. The screenplay is by Julian Fellowes, who was trapped in that original idea. The presiding genius—thus esteemed by many—was Altman, who has struck me through most of his career as egotistically tricky. In blunt contrast, his new film is devoid even of trickery. It simply glides along like many another weekend house party picture. Altman just keeps the camera moving as much as possible. Andrew Dunn's cinematography uses a good deal of light-and-shadow contrast in the downstairs sequences but is otherwise undistinguished.

The only nourishment in this non-feast comes from some of the performances. Michael Gambon is brutally sensual in an aristocratic way. Maggie Smith skillfully spoons up still more airy boredom. (How does Smith remember which film she is in?) Smith's maid, played by Kelly McDonald, has more color than her mistress. Jeremy Northam seems as quietly amused as Novello himself to be part of this tedious party. Alan Bates runs the household adequately in his patently dyed black hair. Helen Mirren gives her role of the housekeeper more genuine pathos than it deserves, and so does Eileen Atkins as the kitchen chief. With Atkins, I couldn't stop thinking that she was the co-author of the television series *Upstairs, Downstairs*, and I kept wondering what she thought of this derivative. (Atkins once told me that her father had been valet to the Spanish ambassador in London and had to iron the *Times* every morning to get the folds out and to keep the ink from staining his master's hands.) The unique Stephen Fry comes along late in the story as a police inspector and spins a nice little comic turn, though I wondered if an inspector would light his pipe just before entering an aristo house and would keep puffing on it as he questioned people.

These actors and their colleagues are too good for this film. Altman's cleverest touch was to engage them so that we would be misled.

Acting talent also gets wasted in **The Royal Tenenbaums** (Touchstone), another picture that breaks implied promises. Gene Hackman is Royal T., and though this time his hair is long and he wears sunglasses and a double-breasted suit with lapels like an eagle's wings, he again works his familiar wizardry. Once again, instead of moving into a character, Hackman has found the character in himself. Royal is a not quite legal lawyer, four-flushing his way around New York, long separated from his wife and three children; but Hackman's flavorsome performance is frittered away in a non-existent story.

The waste is even worse with Anjelica Huston, because she is in fewer films than Hackman and has greater potential. Huston was framed, physically and vocally and temperamentally, to be a major actress. (Remember her in *Enemies: A Love Story* and *Prizzi's Honor* and *A Handful of Dust*.) Her approach to acting is more traditional than Hackman's—one could say more classic, except that she has not had enough good parts to justify the term. Here, as Royal's estranged wife, she moves through her role as legitimately as possible, the queen of a kaleidoscopic realm.

The screenplay sets out to be an eccentric comedy about a flaky family, something along the lines of *You Can't Take It With You*. It was written by the director, Wes Anderson, and Owen Wilson, who is in the cast. (Wilson is also in the current *Spy Game*, again with Hackman.) The film has one resemblance to *Gosford Park*: it takes a long time to identify and to launch its sizable cast. But Altman's film at last struggles through to some kind of story, stale though it is. The Anderson-Wilson story merely fiddles around with its people and their eccentricities for a while, apparently in the belief that just to be fey is enough. Yes, there is a mild attempt at a plot when Royal pretends to have cancer in order to win back his estranged family, but this disquieting gag does not quite redeem the film.

Anderson was previously responsible for the unmemorable *Rushmore*, and is apparently convinced that he is a consummate wacko stylist. The very first shot is of a book called *The Royal Tenenbaums*, and every major sequence thereafter begins with a view of the first lines of a chapter in that book. At the start we see a series of short scenes of the family—almost *tableaux vivants*, especially the three children. Each of them is a juvenile genius in a particular way, finance or tennis or playwriting. Then

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we see them as adults, stagnant. So is the film itself, partly because we never learn what that beginning has to do with what follows.

Anderson keeps scratching for stunts to keep from having to make a film. One instance: the former tennis star comes back from a long cruise on a luxury liner, and as he waits on deck for his family, the ship's officers, in white uniforms, move across the screen behind him in a slow-motion dance. Apparently we are to assume that, precisely because this dance has nothing at all to do with anything, it is all the more ingenious.

Luke Wilson, brother of the co-author, drifts through the tennis role. The other Wilson plays a druggie novelist in love with Gwyneth Paltrow, the now-dehydrated playwright, who literally does nothing all day. Ben Stiller, again frenetically energetic, possibly because he's aware that he is short for a film star, makes the former real estate tycoon irate much of the time. Danny Glover is Huston's accountant, in love with his client, and patiently fulfills his obligations while wearing gingham shirts and bow ties. Bill Murray, bewhiskered and married to Paltrow, does his dry best in a role seemingly suggested by Oliver Sacks.

Anderson's film is a house built of candy sticks that start melting very soon. Too much Anderson. Too much creaky cuteness. Not enough Huston—here and everywhere. ■

Robert Brustein on Theater

Varieties of Theatrical Experience

In a recent interview, the historian turned playwright Charles L. Mee was quoted as saying:

> The decline of theater as an essential art form coincides with the triumph of naturalism and the well-made play—which is boring people crazy out of their minds. The great hope of the theater is that it returns to the immense energies that were in Greek theater and Shakespeare, theater that includes not just text and interpersonal relationships but also spectacle, music, dance, physical performance, color, noise, fabulous events happening.

This passage seems to me well and correctly expressed. As Mee suggests, what exalted Greek theater and Elizabethan theater was their shared capacity to make an immediate appeal to all classes of people through a variety of theatrical forms. It was only in the eighteenth century, after the invention of *drame* and *comédie larmoyante* in France (in England, drama and sentimental comedy), that the preferences of the middle class, which is to say middlebrow taste, began to dominate the theater. These preferences not only obliterated the distinctions between aristocratic and popular taste, between high tragedy and low comedy, between the sacred and the profane, but proscribed any effort to combine the two, as Shakespeare and his contemporaries did so successfully in a previous age. The pious drunkards in Oliver Goldsmith's *She Stoops to Conquer* adore Tony Lumpkin's alehouse singing "bekeays he never gives us nothing that's *low*," which seems to endorse the author's wan assertion in his prologue that "the Comic Muse, long sick, is now a-dying." (He might have said the same about the Tragic Muse—neither can survive very well without the other.)

In the twentieth century, however, serious artists again began to court the Comic Muse out of the conviction that the energies of popular culture were needed to fuel the motor of high art. Eliot knew about this, and so did Joyce and Yeats. And Brecht, Beckett, and Ionesco did as well: it has been a principle of the avant-garde theater at least since *Ubu Roi* and Dada. But mainstream critics and

Political Essayists

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majority audiences have nevertheless maintained their devotion to the middle genre, celebrating *drame* and *comédie larmoyante* in their contemporary transformations as naturalism and the well-made play (sentimental comedy has found a modern expression in soap opera). We have now driven this leveling process so far that in some quarters it is even considered "undemocratic" to mention levels of taste or classes of art. Why else do my students get so nervous when I use phrases like "high" and "low" or try to discriminate among dramatic genres? Isn't discrimination a form of racism? Isn't high art a form of elitism? The Muse of Common Sense, long sick, is now a-dying.

Charles L. Mee not only theorizes about the virtue of mixing genres, he practices it in a spate of theatrical works, both original and adapted. Most of his adaptations are derived from Greek tragedies. Following the death of Paul Schmidt, he has become our foremost classical translator. But Mee goes further than Schmidt did in using classical texts as a springboard for entirely fresh works of theater.

Big Love is an excellent example. Having recently completed a short run at the Brooklyn Academy of Music's Harvey Theater, it is one of a trilogy on the subject of love that Mee has produced in New York this season, the other two being *True Love*, a play about aging sweethearts, and *First Love*, a variant on the story of Phaedra and Hippolytus. *Big Love* is based on an early play of Aeschylus (perhaps the earliest Greek play extant) called *The Suppliant Women*. Aside from Aeschylus's *The Persians*, it is the only Greek tragedy to have as its protagonist a chorus—fifty daughters of Danaus who flee to Argos to avoid marriage with their detested Egyptian cousins.

Mee uses this play, and what is known about the other (now lost) plays in the trilogy, to build a whimsical construction of music, dance, calisthenics, choreography, horseplay, and speechifying regarding the relative merits of the male sex and the female sex. The set consists of three Magritte-like panels of sky and landscape, plus a pink bathtub sitting under a chandelier. And the play begins when a red-headed woman in a wedding dress walks through the audience and, to the accompaniment of the wedding march from *Le Nozze di Figaro*, turns on the water, takes off all her clothes, and climbs into the tub. She reveals herself further as Lydia (Carolyn Baeumler), one of fifty Greek refugees who have come to this Italian island on a cruise ship to seek asylum from their American Greek suitors.

November

When the executioner's bored he's dangerous.
The blazing sky rolls itself up.

From cell to cell there's knocking
and space wells up through the ground frost.

A few stones shine like full moons.

Tomas Tranströmer

—translated from the Swedish by Rika Lesser

Lydia is soon joined by Olympia (Aimée Guillot) and Thyona (K. J. Sanchez), the one a blonde bimbo, the other a thundering feminist, who together (in company with a couple of mute actresses) represent the fifty wronged women from Greece. Having unloaded themselves about the incorrigible nature of mankind, they illustrate this with a raucous rock number (Lesley Gore's "You Don't Own Me"), holding their bunched dresses in one hand while wielding a wine bottle as a microphone. Later they punctuate their man-hating expletives with a series of stunning physical gymnastics choreographed by Jean Isaacs, leaping into the air and landing flat on the wrestling-mat floor. (The evening also features a fetching rendition of "Bewitched, Bothered, and Bewildered"—a gay man's tribute to his departed lover.) The songs and the acrobatics are great stuff, full of electric energy, and they make the evening very winning, even when momentous things start intruding upon the comic action. There is something eerie and disorienting in the realization that a tragedy will soon be enacted by these spoiled women, preoccupied as most of them are with bath oils from Chanel, Estée Lauder pancake makeup, and Tropicana sun creams.

Eventually the would-be grooms arrive by helicopter, wearing jumpsuits over their wedding tuxedos. One of them, a sexist pig named Constantine (Mark Zeisler), demonstrates how misogyny can be just as ferocious as misanthropy. After much discussion of sex and love, and additional calisthenics on the wrestling mat by the maddened men, they give the women an ultimatum: "The weddings will take place today.... We have become our own country now where we make the laws ourselves."

As in the myth, all but one of the women slaughter their husbands immediately following the ceremony, to the accompaniment of stately Baroque music. They thereupon sink to the ground in a dazed reverie, the blood of their sacrifices smeared across their white gowns like gory badges. The one who refuses to follow orders is Lydia (in Aeschylus she is called Hypermnestra), who, having fallen in love with the gentle, stammering Nikos (Bruce Mackenzie), declines to murder him. Their union is defended by Bella (Lauren Klein), a salty Italian woman who, as a stand-in for Aeschylus's Aphrodite, delivers a sententious speech about the need for love ("If we can't embrace each other, what hope do we have of life?").

This speech proves to be one of the few missteps in the play. For most of its length, *Big Love* is a delectable hot fudge sundae of a production, directed by Les Waters with a uniformly appealing cast. These characters may find relationships between men and women generally incompatible, but, with Mee acting as marriage broker, they have no trouble establishing a harmonious union between serious and popular art.

Nor does Robert Wilson in his latest musical theater production, **POEtry,** a collaboration with the rock composer Lou Reed. Performed in the Gilman Opera House at BAM, where Wilson also produced *Alice* and *The Black Rider* (both with music by Tom Waits), the musical reminds us of how often Wilson has worked with the advanced figures of popular culture: Lou Reed in *Time Rocker* (also produced at BAM), David Byrne in *The Knee Plays*, and Laurie Anderson and Charles "Honi" Coles in *Alcestis* (both produced at the American Repertory Theatre). Even some of his collaborations with Philip Glass might be considered works of popular musical theater, since Glass is a composer who moves easily between the rock world and the classical music world. Those who consider Wilson a forbidding priest of high art often fail to recognize what a droll, whimsical, and mischievous man he can be.

POEtry is an effort to theatricalize the stories and poems of a true American literary eccentric. Or, as Reed's continuing refrain goes: "These are the stories of Edgar Allan Poe—not exactly the boy next door." Although the songs are in English, Poe's work is spoken in German by the excellent Thalia Theater company, then translated back into English via supertitles. (Some of us are of the opinion that this is the way O'Neill should be produced in this country—translated into a foreign tongue, then re-translated into speakable English.) Meanwhile, with the songs shrieking at us in the manner of The Who's *Tommy*, Wilson proceeds to

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create his startling gallery of visual images, like a painter doodling during a rock concert. Wilson's references in this piece are essentially to classic horror movies: white-faced actors with slashed scarlet mouths out of *The Cabinet of Doctor Caligari*; a character made up like Elsa Lanchester in *The Bride of Frankenstein*; obelisks and monoliths opening to reveal a figure with huge red fingers; windows slowly creaking open; three female bodies floating in space; a man with a half-blue face drilling his head with a spike; a tall microcephalic figure who removes his head; and then an emcee in a tux who comes on stage to belt out a Broadway showstopper: "Let the saxophones blow."

Sometimes Wilson illustrates a tale, as in the episode based on "The Tell-Tale Heart," in which seven actors with flashlights bear witness to the beating of "his hideous heart." Sometimes, as in "The Cask of Amontillado," the action and the dialogue ("I will fuck him up the ass and piss in his face") wander a considerable distance from the events of the story. Wilson bombards the audience with visual surprises and eerie sounds, always searching for images that will stir his imagination. Heaven knows where this creature comes from. Like Poe, he is not exactly the boy next door. But it must be admitted that this kind of imagistic fusillade can begin to grow somewhat willed and tiresome, as it does here in the second act, in which Wilson's inventions seem divorced from any recognizable reality. I have been watching the work of this prolific artist for about twenty-five years now, and I have never known him to repeat himself. But he lately seems to be getting somewhat predictable in his unpredictability. Perhaps he should consider taking a little more time between his copious creations.

Mary Zimmerman's highly praised production of **Metamorphoses** at the Second Stage Theater has a set somewhat similar to Mee's *Big Love* (Magritte-like panels, a chandelier, and water on the stage—here in the form of a paneled swimming pool rather than a bathtub). It would also seem to satisfy Mee's conditions for revitalized theater in other ways. It has a little music, a bit of spectacle, color, noise, and "fabulous events happening," and it is based on an agreeable collection of fables. But while Ovid is a great love poet, his *Metamorphoses*, with its soft characters and semi-happy endings, is considerably closer to *drame* than it is to tragedy or comedy. And Zimmerman's production, despite a few obligatory nods to experimental theater convention, comes off more as middlebrow entertainment than as tough and compelling theater. I am not familiar with all of this Chicago director's creations, but those I have seen have struck me as relatively innocuous imitations of such bolder artists as Lee Breuer, Elizabeth LaComte, and Robert Wilson.

Putting *Metamorphoses* on stage is not an original idea. As early as 1968, another Chicago director, Paul Sills, conceived of theatricalizing Ovid as an extension of his Story Theater form. *Ovid's "Metamorphoses"* was performed at Yale in 1969, followed by a sequel, *Olympian Games*, in 1971. Both shows were staged by Larry Arrick (the first under Sills's supervision), with music by Barbara Damashek and choreography by Carmen de Lavallade. I produced them, but I would hardly claim that the Yale versions were superior to Zimmerman's. Ours were equally bland and balmy, glimmering shards of weightless entertainment. Charming as Ovid is as a storyteller, he hardly gets into your marrow bones.

Following Story Theater tradition, *Metamorphoses* is mostly poetic narrative with theatrical illustrations. Zimmerman gives us about eight or nine of Ovid's tales, all of them concluding with the transformation of humans into some other form through the intervention of the gods. What Zimmerman adds, a little too cutely, is anachronism. Midas (Raymond Fox) is represented as a businessman in a three-piece suit who turns a profit on everything he touches, including his little daughter, who metamorphoses into a golden statue. The fable of Phaeton, a prototype of Icarus, becomes the story of a man (Doug Hara) confessing to his therapist (Lisa Tejero) about his desire to fly as high as his father, Apollo (who won't give him the keys to the car).

Other transformations are relatively straightforward. A woman whose husband has drowned turns into a bird. A man who has cut down a grove sacred to Ceres is afflicted with a ravenous hunger and almost eats his own child (who is saved when Poseidon changes her as well into a bird). We get two versions of Orpheus and Eurydice, one of Narcissus, and one story—the only one—that comes close to tragedy, regarding Myrrha (Anjali Bhimani), who fell in love with her own father and surreptitiously slept with him. (Not included here is another potentially tragic story, that of the raped Philomela who transforms into a nightingale, which Shakespeare adapted in *Titus Andronicus*.) Myrrha escapes her father's wrath (and a tragic fate) by turning into a tree. Another couple that become vegetation are Baucis and Philemon, who alone among their neighbors give hospitality to two disguised gods (Brecht adapted this tale in *The Good Woman of Setzuan*). The only reward they ask is to die together at

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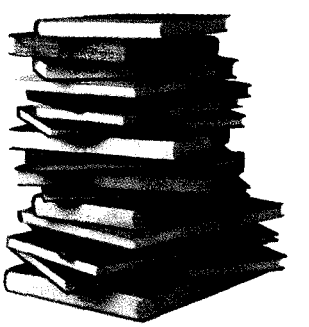

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the same instant, and Zeus and Hermes give them immortality as enfolded trees.

Zimmerman and her actors tell these stories with verve and energy. But they tax neither the imaginations nor the minds of the audience, which is why the show has been tapped for Broadway and will undoubtedly flourish there (though it needs more music to ensure a long run). There will be always a warm welcome in the commercial theater for the Muse of Middle Seriousness. What we need is more respect for the neglected Muses of Tragedy and Comedy. ■

When She Was Good

By MARTHA C. NUSSBAUM

Iris Murdoch: A Life by Peter J. Conradi

(W.W. Norton, 706 pp., $35)

I.

HOW IS MORAL philosophy related to narrative fiction? One would think that the relationship ought to be an intimate one. Both genres are concerned with character and choice, with motives and imaginings, with the vicissitudes of passion. And yet, from the time when Plato attacked the tragic artists, the relationship has often been characterized by mutual suspicion, philosophers viewing narrative literature as indulgent, emotional, and lacking in normative clarity, writers of fiction viewing philosophers as intolerant moralists who lack appreciation of what Proust calls the "intermittences of the heart." But some cultures and some periods have been marked by especially hostile relations between the camps. In the latter half of the twentieth century, fiction and philosophy drew close in France, with Sartre and Camus writing both kinds of books and blurring the distinction. In the English-speaking world, by contrast, things were very different. Very few noted philosophers attempted fiction, and Iris Murdoch was the only eminent novelist to publish serious works of moral philosophy.

To some extent, the reason for this estrangement was cultural. British academic society had a marked distaste for the public display of strong passions. For the typical Oxbridge don, novelists were a little like actors: amusing at a distance, embarrassing if they came too close. To some extent, too, the estrangement was stylistic. Anglo-American philosophy was written in a very austere and impersonal way, so that any incursion of narrative and emotion into the text would be regarded as an embarrassing anomaly. But how could a novelist not want to record the texture of concrete particulars—what Murdoch once memorably described in the hallowed precincts of the Aristotelian Society as "the smell of the Paris metro or what it is *like* to hold a mouse in one's hand"? Her remark was shocking in those quarters, because it insisted that such details of experience were the stuff of philosophy as well as the stuff of life. People were not yet ready to listen.

Above all, the estrangement between philosophy and literature was produced by issues of philosophical substance. Moral philosophy in the postwar period had become preoccupied—not surprisingly, given the tumultuous times—with the moment of ethical choice, and with the role of the will in choosing the appropriate action. R. M. Hare, who had spent time in a prisoner-of-war camp and on the Burmese railway, had no interest at all in the inner life, or in the effort to cultivate the thoughts and the feelings of a person of good character. He wanted a philosophy that would produce good in the world and help us understand the nature of good action. His analysis of moral language famously held that all moral statements were in essence commands to act, and this soldierly conception of morality became popular in a world intent on seeing the good defeat the bad. (On the Continent, a similar emphasis prevailed: Sartre depicted the moral agent as a free and isolated will, capable of choosing courageously for the sake of humanity only if it could first come to grips with the agony of being free.)

To this muscular conception of philosophy, the preoccupations of the novelist—the vagaries of emotion and desire, the variety of human character, the predatoriness of love—looked simply irrelevant, as if one had suggested that a grandiose salon painting of "The Choice of Hercules" could be improved by the addition of a floating indeterminate sky in the style of Turner. But the choice-of-Hercules conception of the ethical life left out a good deal, and these omissions were damaging to the postwar philosophers' own project of understanding how good can be done and evil can be avoided. For evil is very likely to begin in the inner world, with the struggle of love against infantile egoism and ambivalence, the laborious effort to form patterns of thought and action that defeat narcissism and acknowledge the reality of other people.

Oddly enough, these British philosophers were all teaching the Greeks, and they must have encountered there a richer view of the moral life. Teaching Aristotle, they would have reflected that a person's goodness does not consist in isolated moments of willing, but rather in a lifelong effort to cultivate patterns of motivation, attention, reaction, and, related to all these, choice. The effort was a virtuous one only if these patterns became genuinely rooted, suffusing the moral life. Aristotle certainly had too simple and too sunny a conception of the obstacles to goodness in the human personality, in part because he took no interest in children; but his conception is promising in its general shape, and it can be deepened by the addition of a more nuanced psychology. Still, teaching Aristotle did not affect the substance of what Oxford philosophers wrote—until much later, and under the influence of Iris Murdoch.

MURDOCH WAS, FOR many years, an anomaly: a celebrated and also popular novelist, and at the same time a respected philosophy tutor at Oxford, who throughout her career (even after she quit teaching) continued to publish serious philosophical essays and books. For most of this time Murdoch opposed any effort to connect her two careers. In an interview with Bryan Magee in 1978, on the subject of "Philosophy and the Novel," she offered a caricature of Oxbridge philosophy at its driest as a definition of what philosophy was, and a similarly extreme definition of the novel as uncommitted play, as if to say to her baffled interlocutor: "See? You thought you'd do a program about how my two careers are connected. But there's no such connection, except in your well-intentioned head." As Peter J. Conradi's book makes clear, Murdoch had a constant desire to mystify and to prevent

MARTHA C. NUSSBAUM's new book, *Upheavals of Thought: The Intelligence of Emotions*, has just been published by Cambridge University Press.

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people from finding her where she was, and this interview was a splendid case in point.

Needless to say, there are profound connections between Murdoch's fiction and Murdoch's philosophy, and they become more apparent all the time. For Anglo-American moral philosophy has by now achieved a broader conception of its subject matter, which would today be agreed to include the virtues and the vices, the nature of imagination and attention, the vicissitudes of passion. And Murdoch's novels, which once looked like stylized social comedy portraying the foibles of the British upper middle classes, can now be seen more justly as complicated meditations about the nature of sin and the struggle of the personality with itself, in which artistic attention is not only the organizing force that drives the whole, but also, at the same time, an object of critical scrutiny.

The novels are a major part of Murdoch's philosophical contribution, because one cannot fully make the case for the moral significance of the strivings of the inner world without narratives that show at length and in detail what Henry James called "the effort really to see and really to represent," as it contends with "the constant force that makes for muddlement." Conradi misses this, and thus he misses Murdoch's large philosophical importance, assuming that like-minded souls in Oxford, such as Philippa Foot and John McDowell, are more important as philosophical writers about virtue because they were writing more of the conventional sort of philosophical work. What he fails to grasp (perhaps because he gets most of his information about philosophy from Foot) is that the ideas that Murdoch shares with these more conventional contemporaries require for their full exploration a different and riskier type of writing, which only she, with her complex erotic gifts, attempted to deliver.

II.

In 1947, Iris Murdoch wrote in her journal: "For me philosophical problems are the problems of my own life." Conradi's biography makes it clear that Murdoch's life, like her work, was shaped by a moral struggle against the forces of destructiveness and sadism. Conradi is the editor of Murdoch's philosophical essays (a fine volume called *Existentialists and Mystics*) and the author of a good study of the novels. He was also a close friend of Murdoch's, particularly in the final decades of her life. *Elegy for Iris*, John Bayley's moving memoir of his wife's descent into Alzheimer's disease, is dedicated to Conradi and his partner Jim O'Neill, and the last chapter of Conradi's biography describes O'Neill bathing Murdoch at a time when she could only say, with bafflement, "I wrote."

Murdoch gave Conradi access to the journals that she kept for most of her adult life (with some pages excised), and her friends, many of whom are still living, have extensively confided in him. So this is a biography rich in information, written in a humble and tasteful way by an intimate whose aim is to put a lot of material at the reader's disposal, obtruding his own personality as little as possible. (Conradi, a Buddhist, introduced Murdoch to Buddhist conceptions of "unselfing.") As Conradi says, it is not the only sort of biography of her that will be written; but it is, I think, a fine example of its kind.

Iris Murdoch by Alexandra MacMaster for The New Republic

Murdoch was born in 1919, the only child of an Anglo-Irish couple who soon moved from Dublin to London, though they returned to Ireland frequently for holidays. (Murdoch's identification with the Irish was very deep.) Her childhood was a placid one, as she was evidently the delight of her gentle father and her able, enterprising mother. Success at school came easily, in studies and in sports. After Badminton School she went up to Somerville College, Oxford in 1938, where she read Mods and Greats, the taxing undergraduate combination of Greek and Latin literature with ancient history and philosophy. Her interest in Greek conceptions of virtue thus got its start early, and she attended with great enthusiasm Eduard Fraenkel's famous seminar on Aeschylus's *Agamemnon*. (Fraenkel figures as a character in *The Unicorn*, one of her odder and less successful novels.) She was deeply influenced also by her philosophy tutor Donald MacKinnon, whose religious sensibility put him at odds with the times. She joined the Communist Party.

But this was wartime, and Oxford was greatly altered by the departure of so many young men for the front. Murdoch's first great love was Frank Thompson, the elder brother of the historian E.P. Thompson. They exchanged intimate letters while he served in Europe, and his death in Bulgaria in 1944 was a personal tragedy. After receiving a first-class degree, Murdoch went to London to work for the Treasury, sharing a flat with Philippa Bosanquet, later Foot. (Shortly before this, Murdoch left the Communist Party. Her past membership caused her no subsequent difficulty in Britain, though for years it made trouble every time she wanted to visit the United States.) In 1944, bored with the life of the bureaucrat ("I am inefficient and administration depresses me"), she joined UNRRA (the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration), and worked for two years with refugees and displaced persons, first in England and then on the Continent.

After a period studying philosophy in Cambridge—where she briefly encountered and was deeply impressed by Wittgenstein, though she was critical of his

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destructive use of his power, his capacity to destroy self-respect—she accepted a tutorial fellowship at St. Anne's College, Oxford. For the next six years or so, she taught philosophy by day, and by night she pursued the amazingly complex erotic life that she had already begun in London. The reader of Murdoch's novels tends to think that the constant changing of partners is fantastic high comedy; but life and art were closer than we thought. As Murdoch writes of herself, "Urge towards drama is fundamental. I am 'full of representations of myself.'"

MURDOCH TYPICALLY CARRIED on simultaneous affairs with multiple men (and the occasional woman), affairs that were emotionally complex and often involved the betrayal of a friend. Sex, Bayley opines in *Elegy for Iris*, was of marginal interest to her where most of these men are concerned. Conradi's biography casts doubt on this, suggesting that she was a person of very strong physical passion. But sex was certainly, for her, about more than pleasure: it was about power, about mystification, about her own importance, about the desire, as she puts it in her journal, "to give moderately and yet have full attention."

She constantly caused pain to others, both the men who had to compete with other concealed rivals and the partners of these men. (Her friendship with Philippa Foot was broken for years on account of the suffering that she caused Michael Foot when she left him for the economist Tommy Balogh, a suffering for which Philippa consoled Michael. Murdoch wrote that Philippa "most successfully salvaged what was left after my behaviour," a characteristically self-dramatizing way of seeing the situation.) "Let me do no harm to [him or her]": this becomes a regular refrain in the journals. And yet she goes on doing harm.

Her lovers were almost all intellectually distinguished, and they fell into two types: the gentle and childlike (usually close to her own age) and the fascinating and cruel (usually much older). Murdoch indulged her fascination with the second sort while planning ultimately to settle down with the first sort. In the first category were the anthropologist and poet Franz Steiner, to whom she almost became engaged before he died young of a heart attack, and the literary critic John Bayley, whom she married—her "ideal co-child," in his words, with whom she had a relationship of immense gentleness and intimacy that seems to have kept at bay, at least for the most part, the more destructive aspects of her character. They created together a world of shared childhood, in which they called each other "Puss" and spoke a secret language, and at the same time shared a sense of life that only two sophisticated intellectuals could share. The marriage represented a remarkably successful incorporation of disparate elements.

But for some time before the marriage, and during the early days of her relationship with Bayley, the second sort held center stage. Murdoch formed alliances with a series of difficult and power-hungry older men, including Balogh and, most prominently, Elias Canetti, a charismatic figure who was constantly surrounded by worshipful disciples. Why Murdoch would spend even one evening in his company is more than one can fathom from Conradi's and Bayley's accounts of this loathsome and sinister egotist. Here is Bayley, in *Elegy for Iris*, describing a conversation in which Canetti asks him what he thinks of *King Lear*, and Bayley, after doing his best to answer the question, asks Canetti the same:

> He continued to be silent for what seemed a long time. Finally, he spoke. "Friends tell me that my book is unbearable," he said. Fortunately, I knew this to be a reference to his long novel *Die Blendung*, and I nodded my head gravely. There was a further silence. "*King Lear* is also unbearable," he pronounced at last.
>
> I bowed my head. Shakespeare and his masterpiece would never be paid a greater compliment than this.

Is this story true? (Bayley, who has publicly admitted to making up love affairs in a more recent memoir, is certainly capable of fabrication in the cause of maligning a rival.) But true or not in its details, it seems to be largely right about Canetti, who was grotesquely self-preoccupied, patently sadistic, incapable of non-exploitative love. When she chose the gently devious Bayley over the "great man," Murdoch ultimately chose wisely. And perhaps Bayley's reaction to Canetti is the basis for that splendid moment in *A Fairly Honourable Defeat*, one of her finest novels, when Simon, the young, gentle, pleasure-loving gay man, simply tosses Julius, the destructive enchanter, into his hosts' swimming pool. Simon, like Bayley, looks like a lightweight, but his whimsical humor, his ability to wear his heart on his sleeve, his total lack of cruelty, are the novel's moral core.

THE POWER OF the enchanter, such a major theme in Murdoch's novels as well as in her life: where does it come from? And what was it in Murdoch that made it impossible for her to have the healthy "into the swimming pool you go" reaction to these loathsome tyrants? Murdoch puzzled over this, again and again, in journals and in novels. Why *do* people let enchanters walk into their homes and destroy their relationships? In part because of their distinction—but she casts doubt on this source of erotic power by stripping Julius, the Canetti figure in *A Fairly Honourable Defeat*, of any real achievement. In part, no doubt, because of their wit and charm. But Julius is charming in the way that Mephistopheles is charming: he mocks everything that people hold dear, he gives the appearance of depth and profundity because he claims that human life is at bottom a sordid affair in which the baser instincts are driving everything. (So Canetti, casting doubt on Murdoch's political ideals, and insisting that the drives of the crowd produce all real historical events.)

So this just pushes the question back a step: why do people want this variety of enchantment? Murdoch's answer, in the end, is that it is the power of destructiveness and negativity itself that seduces, because many people have a sadomasochistic desire to be crushed, and to crush others in turn. She felt this at a personal sexual level. (Once she wrote in her journal that she felt herself to be a sadomasochistic homosexual man.) From the male enchanters, she endured—and evidently sought—an astonishing degree of exploitation and psychological abuse. With the gentle men, and also with women, she wanted to play, at times, the destroying man. (One journal entry reads: "Then I began to kiss her passionately and was desiring her very much. Understanding of what it would be to be a man, feeling very violent & positive, wanting to strike her body like an instrument.")

Murdoch connects sadomasochism with moral nihilism, and hence goodness with a gentleness that is free of sadism. For some, gentleness is a kind of grace with which they are fortunately endowed. (She once wrote that Bayley, like her father, was "a man entirely without the natural coarseness & selfishness of the male.") For Murdoch, who found in herself much "male" selfishness and coarseness, it became a lifelong project to achieve a non-destructive relation to people. This struggle is the source of much of her fiction.

It is natural for the reader of the biography to hope that it will trace the struggle to some early source. One close friend does tell Conradi that he thinks "something in Iris's past had introduced her to the idea of evil." But nothing reveals to us what this something is. Her father was a gentle man, her childhood was a happy one. At most one might say that she won the Oedipal struggle too easily, becoming her father's delight while her parents' very

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amicable marriage was apparently almost totally asexual. While Julius's destructiveness is explained—somewhat too easily—by making him a survivor of Belsen, young Iris was head girl in a prestigious school, a success at everything she tried, courted and loved by a large proportion of those who knew her. The darkness seems indigenous, lurking, inexplicable—and so it apparently seemed to her. While initially sympathetic to psychoanalysis, she came to feel that it told comforting, too-orderly stories about good and evil, which she preferred to see as real, absolute forces in human existence.

MURDOCH THUS CAME to see her own life, and life generally, as a moral struggle against what we might without melodrama call Mephistopheles: the nihilistic wiles of the self-insulating ego, which seeks power and comfort, exploiting and using other people. Its adversary is the moral imagination, which must strive constantly toward a clear vision of the reality of other people, one not marred by the ego's demands for control. One can see how difficult the struggle against her tendencies to control must have been from the extreme forms that it took, as she increasingly cultivated a shapeless and asexual physical persona and domestic surroundings whose squalor greatly exceeded even the British norm.

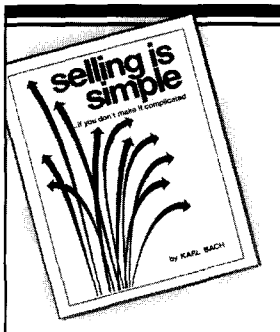
The novels, too, often associate neatness with egoism, vile filth with virtue. Thus Tallis Browne in *A Fairly Honourable Defeat*, who lives amid mold and vermin of all sorts, is a moral hero, in part because of this neglect of surroundings, and Julius's controlling sadism is revealed in his determination to clean the place up. Worse still, it is supposed to be good for Tallis to take a troubled teenage boy into his house—whereas this (no doubt all-too-controlling) American reader keeps feeling that charges of child abuse would be appropriate, both against Tallis and against the mother who promotes this life-threatening and (so it seems to me) quite sadistic arrangement. Bayley perceptively writes that Murdoch wanted to have objects around her and yet did not want to take care of them. Perhaps this neglect of the worldly was a part of her exacting idea of virtue, though it can easily look like a kind of aggression toward anyone who dares to come too close. Toward the end of her life Murdoch also re-wrote past journal entries, removing the names of sentiments, such as anger and contempt, that she felt she should not have had.

Conradi, who knew Murdoch in the last decades of her life, feels that her struggle was in the end successful. Her marriage to Bayley, though a source of great happiness, was not without tumult. A passionate lesbian affair in the early 1960s led her to resign from St. Anne's (this is the only instance in which Conradi conceals the name of a lover). One gets the impression that there were other lesser affairs. Still, as time went on Murdoch increasingly, if unevenly, distanced herself from her erotic self. The philosopher David Pears has remarked upon her "luminous goodness ... when she came into a room, you felt better." And many have attested to her intense aliveness to others. Murdoch's moral serenity seems proportionate to her focus on her husband. As time went on, Bayley's elaborate jokes and small kindnesses struck her as goodness itself. "4 January 1978. Puss singing in kitchen below. He is a *good man*." A year later, quoting a silly yet sophisticated impromptu Bayley poem about Strindberg and a skunk, she writes: "Of such is the kingdom of heaven."

III.

FOR SOMEONE WITH such a tumultuous inner world, the muscular choice-is-all school of moral philosophy could not be satisfactory. Murdoch felt that we would get to the right choices only if we understood better the forces militating against goodness. And in her view the main force was our inability to see other people correctly. We are always representing people to ourselves in self-serving ways, she believed, ways that gratify our own egos and serve our own ends. To see truly is not the entirety of virtue, but it is a very crucial necessary part. And even where the overt choices go along well, if the inner vision is lacking, then an important part of virtue itself is lacking. (Here Murdoch agrees with Aristotle: there is a morally large difference between self-control and real virtue, even though the overt acts may look exactly the same, because the self-controlled person has not yet achieved the motives, the reactions, and the patterns of seeing that are characteristic of the good person.)

To make this point clear for philosophers, Murdoch invented an example that has become famous. In her lecture on "The Sovereignty of Good," she asks us to imagine a mother-in-law, M, who has contempt for D, her daughter-in-law. M sees D as common, cheap, low. Since M is a self-controlled Englishwoman, she behaves (so Murdoch stipulates) with perfect graciousness all the while, and no hint of her real view surfaces in her acts. But she realizes, too, that her feelings and thoughts are unworthy, and likely to be generated by jealousy and an excessively keen desire to hang on to her son. So she



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sets herself a moral task: she will change her view of D, making it more accurate, less marred by selfishness. She gives herself exercises in vision: where she is inclined to say "coarse," she will say, and see, "spontaneous." Where she is inclined to say "common," she will say, and see, "fresh and naïve." As time goes on, the new images supplant the old. Eventually M does not have to make such an effort to control her actions: they flow naturally from the way she has come to see D.

Murdoch claims that this change is of moral significance. Getting the behavior right is one good thing; but getting the thoughts and the emotions right is another, and in some ways a more fundamental, good thing. She challenges moral philosophy to attend more to these long-term tasks in vision and self-cultivation, to focus on patterns of character that extend over a life rather than simply on isolated moments of choice. The challenge was first voiced in her splendid and highly critical book on Sartre, which appeared in 1953. Murdoch argued that because of his focus on the moment of choice, Sartre could not understand the sources of good or evil, which requires depicting "the mystery and contingent variousness of individuals." To Sartre's impoverished world she contrasts "the messy accidental world of the novel, so full of encounters and moral conflicts and love."

MURDOCH'S CHALLENGE TO moral philosophy was given its most forceful articulation in 1970 in *The Sovereignty of Good*, which includes three of her most influential essays, and it was expressed strongly again six years later in *The Fire and the Sun: Why Plato Banished the Artists*. (The meandering *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals*, Murdoch's expanded Gifford Lectures, which appeared in 1992, was a much less successful treatment of these themes.) It was Murdoch's early work that had a transformative impact on the discipline. Younger philosophers, themselves reacting against the neglect of the inner world, found illumination in the challenge of this example. Now few would deny that the then-unknown subject of "moral psychology" is one of the most important and fascinating branches of ethics; or that thinking about the nature of the emotions and the imagination, and what they contribute to moral choice, is one of the most significant tasks of the moral philosopher.

There are major gaps in Murdoch's philosophical vision. She seems almost entirely to lack interest in the political and social determinants of a moral vision, and in the larger social criticism that ought, one feels, to be a major element in the struggle against one's own defective tendencies. Her examples, and her characters, are almost always undone by something universal about the ego and its devious workings, almost never by prejudice or misogyny or other failings endemic to a particular society at a particular time. Indeed, although her journals fairly often complain about the hardship of being a woman at Oxford, she offers us little guidance in understanding how sexism thwarts perception. Race is almost totally unmentioned, except in the form of an erotic longing for, and anxiety about, Jews—a theme in her own life as well, but one that is never treated with the critical detachment that it deserves.

Only with regard to the lives of gay men does Murdoch retain a sense of the purely social and political obstacles to correct vision and action. She was a vigorous crusader for the abolition of sodomy laws, and in her fiction she depicted gay couples as fighting an uphill struggle for love and self-respect in a society that makes fun of them, or worse. In *A Fairly Honourable Defeat*, the older gay man Axel, working in Whitehall, has learned habits of secretiveness and denial that make it hard for him to express his love to Simon, or even to allow himself to be a person who fully loves. Simon, treated by straight society as a sex addict, has learned to doubt his own capacities for commitment and for goodness. But such suggestions of a complex relation between virtue and its social world should have played a more prominent role in the philosophical essays and the novels: all too rarely does Murdoch suggest that goodness requires reflection about social justice. Too often, indeed, the absence of a more textured social world impoverishes her characters, who seem to play out their erotic dance in a void.

Another problem, a deeper problem, is the tension between Murdoch's Platonism and her vision of particulars. Murdoch keeps on suggesting that "The Good" is a unitary abstraction of some kind, even while all her writerly instincts work in the direction of showing its irreducible many-sidedness and its kaleidoscopic variety; even while she also insists that what it is to be a good person is to see other particular people clearly. Her Platonism leads in the direction of the big abstract entity, but her moral instincts—I am tempted to call them Aristotelian—lead in the direction of the variegated world of surprising humanity. This tension is never fully resolved in the essays, where it simply sits there generating difficulty, or in the novels, where the vision of the particular predominates, but characters whom the writer appears to admire keep on talking what sounds like nonsense about "The Good." This fault in Murdoch's work may derive from her own experience of good and evil as original powers that stand somehow outside her, not generated by her particular biography. But they do mean that anyone who wishes to make philosophical use of her work must choose between the Aristotelian many-sidedness or the Platonic mysticism. (I know which I regard as the more fruitful, in philosophy and in life.)

FINALLY, THERE IS an acute problem about action. Hare's vision of life is certainly incomplete; but it contains much that matters greatly. As the postwar generation knew, it does matter what one does. If one resists tyranny and saves the lives of the innocent, who cares if one was thinking "coarse" and "common" or, more virtuously, "spontaneous" and "fresh"? Murdoch is so preoccupied with the goings-on of the inner world that she seems almost to have forgotten about the difference that action can make; and the resulting obsession with one's own states looks strangely like egoism, in a world in which a forthright commitment to action can make the difference to people who are suffering, no matter whether the agents' intentions are pure.

Many years ago I had dinner with R. M. Hare in Oxford. With typical testiness, he complained about the new fashion for virtue ethics, which had eroded, he felt, philosophy's commitment to good works. Mentioning the cover of a book by one of his targets, which showed a naked man carrying a question mark over his shoulder, he said scornfully that this is what philosophy had become: meaning, I think, that it was all preoccupied with our naked insides and the interminable questions they pose, rather than armed for combat against real bad people and things. I have some sympathy with this way of seeing the movement that Murdoch inspired. Although there is no doubt that the big questions of social justice and human well-being need to be approached with an adequate moral psychology, Murdoch herself tended to veer sharply away from those questions, and even to suggest that in the end they did not matter, that the only important thing was each person's struggle for self-perfection.

That is a hopelessly egoistic vision of life, in a world in which sharp thinking about poverty and prejudice may actually make a difference to human lives. Whatever combination of Platonism, Christianity, and Buddhism shaped her sensibility, it was an oddly otherworldly sensibility in the end, as if we were already dead and in purgatory. But we are still on earth, so if we must try to see other people as well as we can, we must also try to create just institutions and just laws. This does not mean that it is the duty of every philoso-

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pher to talk only about justice; we all have our own projects. The mistake in Murdoch is her subtle suggestion that the search for justice is superficial.

IV.

MURDOCH'S PHILOSOPHICAL vision is fulfilled in her novels, which dramatize again and again the struggle to see clearly, in a world of self-delusion, the revelations and the blindings of erotic love. Although the more schematic essays were crucial in laying out the essential elements of her view, showing what is really at stake required the creation of extended patterns of vision and struggle. The best of her novels, such as *The Black Prince*, *The Bell*, and *The Sea, The Sea*, are plainly continuous with the themes of her philosophy, and make good on its promises in a rich, devious, and open-ended way.

Since the imagination played such a central role in Murdoch's moral thought, she arrived at a grave and highly critical view of the artist's moral role. In her view, artists are our guides to a vision of the world: they shape and nourish, or they fail to shape and nourish, the moral imagination. So art cannot evade morality. The artist is inevitably a moral figure: for art either assuages the ego, portraying an easy, flattering vision of the world and making us cozy within it, or it challenges us outward, toward the reality of others.

Where did Murdoch place her own fiction within the contrast between great art and egoistic art that she develops in *The Fire and the Sun*? In purgatory, no doubt: struggling to be pure, but full of silly self-regard. Conradi is probably correct to see her own parody of herself in the comic figure of Arnold Baffin in *The Black Prince*, a popular novelist who produces a novel a year, all full of high metaphysical matters and comforting the reader with the sensation of having experienced deep thoughts. And some of the later novels do seem pseudo-profound, in part because they give expression to a monistic metaphysical vision that she never made fully compelling in any genre. Still, the complex moral and literary richness of Murdoch's best novels grows more evident all the time, now that we no longer read them as realist social satire, and can appreciate their allegorical elements.

There is an odd paradox in the relationship between the novels and the morality that they (and the philosophical writings) contain. The paradox is that their very coming-into-being would appear, by the lights of Murdoch's morality, to be an immoral act, an act of manipulation and excessive control. No artist wants to give an unfinished work to the world as a token of her vision. "Here is my messy moldy verminous novel": no writer says this. That is why Tallis Browne is no artist; indeed, he cannot even finish the one lecture that he keeps trying to write. Murdoch's art, like all good art, is highly structured and controlled—a house neat and clean enough to satisfy the most morally obtuse of her upper-class British characters. Indeed, her novels draw attention more than most to the presence of centralized control, as the characters execute a complicated erotic dance whose choreographer is always just offstage.

For such an artist, as Proust's narrator says, real people are just material, the stones that the artist uses to build his monument. The artist's vision of reality is finally a vision that he makes completely, using and even exploiting others; and its relation to the real surprisingness of people can never be morally simple. Murdoch sought uncontrol and "unselfing" all her life, as a corrective to egoism and sadism. Yet she so plainly seeks control, too; and she knows it. Moreover, she herself makes Proust's connection: in one period of emotional suffering, she observes in her journal that "like Proust I want to escape from the eternal push and rattle of time into the coolness & poise of a work of art." Can the perfection of art possibly co-exist with the attempt to perfect one's life, as she sees that aim? In the form of such a question the struggle renews itself, as the morality of art and the artist's own rage for control become a topic of anxious rumination on the part of characters, such as Bradley Pearson in *The Black Prince*, who seem to be surrogates for Murdoch's own sense of herself as artist. Does the artistic enterprise record and extend the struggle against the ego, or is it the ego's most subtle victory?

I connect this problem, very tentatively, to my own acquaintance with Murdoch. We met in New York in 1985, and she invited me to lunch at the house in Charlbury Road, Oxford where she and Bayley lived at the time. I went round to the house, very nervous and awkward, and sat for two hours in the chaotic kitchen being scrutinized, as I felt it, by her sharp probing eyes. We talked about Proust and Henry James, about postmodernism and current developments in ethical thought, about Charles Taylor, whom she admired, and R. M. Hare, whom she did not. All the while I felt that her very intense gaze was going straight through me, to something that was not me at all, but to which I was somehow related. More than once I had the thought that Julian Baffin, in *The Black Prince*, has about Bradley Pearson: "You don't really see me." I cannot forget those predatory eyes, and the way they attended to something of immense importance that was, as I say, not exactly outside of me, and that was perhaps more real than me, but that was not precisely me either. Nor can I ever forget the essential mysteriousness of her face, so much more alive than most people, so blazing with uncompromising passion, so intent upon things that were not exactly in the room. (I remember thinking a sad thought: that this was going to be the hoped-for friendship with a brilliant woman, but it is after all an encounter with just another predatory man. Erotic control and artistic control: where did one leave off and the other begin?)

If the gaze of art is fixed on the person and is at the same time intent on a creative work that appropriates and goes beyond the person, the question is whether this gaze can ever be, in the fullest sense, a humanly loving gaze, exemplary of the virtue that Murdoch's philosophy describes. Why not? It sees more truly than most loving people see. I had no doubt that Murdoch could have described me, after an hour, far more precisely than any lover of mine might have described me after some years. In this sense Proust seems right when he says that art is the fully lived life, life without patches of deadness and obtuseness.

And yet I believe that there is something more to loving vision than just seeing. There is also a willingness to permit oneself to be seen. And there is a willingness to stop seeing, to close one's eyes before the loved one's imperfections. And there is also a willingness to be, for a time, an animal or even a plant, relinquishing the sharpness of creative alertness before the presence of a beloved body. Does the artist's vision have about it these aspects of vulnerability, silence, and grace? Or does the artist's eye almost inevitably look down with something like disdain at the muddled animal interactions of human beings with one another, so obtuse and so lacking in nuance?

STILL, IF THE novels were only tales of control, and their characters only the creatures of a sadistic enchanter, they would be, as Murdoch says, mediocre works. Some of them are indeed mediocre. *The Unicorn*, for example, is a rather sordid and pretentious melodrama about varieties of sexual sadism, in which Murdoch's own self-hatred becomes a hatred of humanity. And often the skepticism about human motivation is so thoroughgoing that one can hardly breathe. But the best of Murdoch's novels get beyond this. Perhaps this is because they are animated by a kind of humble opening toward reality in all its surprising diversity, by a quality of love for the world that even artistic polish cannot defeat.

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And notice, really, that the moral problem I have outlined arises only for a writer who is both deeply moral (as Proust is not) and who has an extreme horror of her own destructiveness—who will not believe that anything she controls could possibly be all right for others. It is the same problem as the problem of the filthy house: only a certain sort of person would feel that her own efforts to clean up must inevitably be sinister, bringing death and destruction in their train. Someone less self-hating might think that there is glory, not sadism, in the beautiful thing.

In the end Murdoch transcended in her best books her own horror of control and cleanliness, allowing herself to express human love (and the artist's love for her characters) in a shapely and beautiful form. Consider this passage from *A Fairly Honourable Defeat*, in which good prose and tenderness unite, for once, to create a vision of happiness:

> Simon went on through the hallway and out into the garden. The sun was still warm and bright, though the evening star had strengthened. The vine was hung with grassy green translucent grapes and the leaves and tendrils glowed with a pale green radiance, outspread and welcoming and still in the quiet sunlight. Simon moved towards the vine, bowed his head under its shadowy arch, and touched the warm pendant beads of the grape bunches.
>
> Axel came out, removing his jacket and rolling up his white shirt sleeves. The sun made gold in his dark hair. "I've asked the *patron* to bring us a carafe of wine out here straight away. I'm just going up to look at the room. You stay here."
>
> Simon sat down at the table. The *patron* bustled over wearing purple braces, with a carafe and two glasses. "*Merci*." Simon poured out some wine and tasted it. It was excellent. The serrated green leaves extended above him, before him, their motionless pattern of angelic hands. The air quivered with warmth and a diffusion of light.
>
> Simon thought, it is an instinct, and not a disreputable one, to be consoled by love. Warily he probed the grief which had traveled with him so far, and he felt it as a little vaguer, a little less dense. His thoughts of Rupert now reached back further into the past, to good times which had their own untouchable reality. He drank some more wine and raised his face to the dazzle of the sun among the leaves and felt his youth lift him and make him buoyant. He was young and healthy and he loved and was loved. It was impossible for him, as he sat there in the green southern light and waited for Axel, not to feel in his veins the warm anticipation of a new happiness.

What is surprising in this passage is not just the suggestion of happiness, but more particularly the suggestion of an erotic happiness and even an erotic goodness, the Dionysian images linked with the imagery of angels' hands. There is no false comfort in Murdoch, but sometimes there is a comfort that is true. ■

The Fame Game

By ALAN WOLFE

Public Intellectuals: A Study of Decline by Richard A. Posner

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I.

ANY METHOD FOR ranking the top one hundred public intellectuals in America cannot be all bad if it includes my name among them. Opening Richard A. Posner's book to the chart that most of his readers will immediately consult, I find myself barely making it at number ninety-eight, one step ahead of Lani Guinier (and one step behind William Butler Yeats). But alas, any sense of accomplishment that I might feel is immediately undercut by two of the decisions that Posner made in conducting his study of public intellectuals. One is methodological. The other is substantive.

The criterion for inclusion on Posner's list is media recognition. He relied on the Lexis/Nexis database to count the number of times between 1995 and 2000 that the names of intellectuals appeared in major newspapers, stories, and transcripts. But to obtain his list of one hundred, he first had to assemble an ever larger list from which to choose; and to get that list (which includes five hundred forty-six names), although he consulted an earlier work on the subject and refers to Web hits and media mentions as proxies, he essentially made it up. As Posner correctly states, there is no census of public intellectuals that defines the whole group from which one can sample. What he should have said explicitly is that, because no such census exists, any list that is generated will be highly subjective.

To downplay the problem of subjectivity, Posner informs the reader that individual names will be included or excluded based on the categories to which they belong. Hence John Rawls is not on his list because, although his work is widely discussed outside the academy—indeed, he receives more media mentions than Thomas Nagel, Martha C. Nussbaum, or Richard Rorty—he is primarily a scholar. But so, without question, are Nagel and the others; the only difference between them and Rawls is that, in addition to their considerable scholarship, they sometimes write an op-ed piece or a book review. Categories, in other words, can be as subjective as the items that they contain. To exclude Rawls but not the others is to judge public intellectuals by their motives in presenting their work, not by their work itself; but surely it makes more sense to call a public intellectual one whose views have seriously influenced the public, which Rawls has done to an admirable degree.

And so it goes with all of Posner's seemingly firm categories. He excludes politicians who write books, such as Richard Nixon, but he includes policy-makers who write books, such as Nixon's secretary of state. (Kissinger ranks first in media mentions.) Journalists such as Maureen Dowd are left out, although her colleague Paul Krugman, because he is also an academic economist, is kept in; but Nicholas Lemann, Nat Hentoff, John B. Judis, E. J. Dionne, Thomas L. Friedman, Janet Malcolm, and Lewis H. Lapham are all journalists who do not hold academic appointments, and Posner includes them as well. Foreigners are included because their work appears in America (which means that most of them are primarily British, Australian, or Canadian), but while such Continental thinkers as Pierre Bourdieu and Jürgen Habermas are on the list, Adam Michnik, Hans Magnus Enzensberger, and Tzvetan Todorov are not. It is OK to be dead and still be included, as the presence of Yeats suggests, but you can also qualify if you were born in the past forty or so years, as were—I am presuming—David Brooks and Ann Coulter. Posner says that he did not want to include novelists such as Hemingway, but why

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then does his list mention Toni Morrison and Aldous Huxley, let alone poets such as Allen Ginsberg or Adrienne Rich?

"I acknowledge the arbitrariness of many of my decisions on whom to classify as a public intellectual," Posner writes. But his decisions are not merely arbitrary; they are nonsensical. Five hundred forty-six is a large number of people—so large that Posner's first cut at the problem reaches down fairly far into the fame game. In this, at least his decision was sound, for if a smaller list is to be drawn from a larger one, then the larger one should be as inclusive as possible, erring on the side of generosity rather than strictness. Surely that explains why Posner includes among his five hundred forty-six such not especially well-known figures as Jonathan Turley, Stephen B. Presser, Nancy Sherman, Henry Manne, and Carol Iannone.

At the same time, Posner's large list manages to pass over a number of thinkers whose work literally free-associates with the term "public intellectual," including Fouad Ajami, Paul Berman, Robert Brustein, Ian Buruma, Frederick Crews, Robert Dallek, Andrew Delbanco, John Patrick Diggins, Michael Eric Dyson, Gerald Early, Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, Jerome Groopman, Hendrik Hertzberg, Robert Hughes, Michael Ignatieff, Kathleen Hall Jamieson, Tony Judt, Wendy Kaminer, Robert Kuttner, Jonathan Lear, Jackson Lears, Sherwin B. Nuland, Kevin Phillips, Marge Piercy, Robert Pinsky, Katha Pollitt, David Remnick, David Rieff, Philip Rieff, Edward Rothstein, Alan Ryan, Juliet Schor, Simon Schama, Jim Sleeper, Peter Steinfels, Margaret Talbot, Sam Tanenhaus, Terry Teachout, Deborah Tannen, James Traub, Geoffrey Wheatcroft, C. K. Williams, Ellen Willis, James Wood, and Fareed Zakaria. Posner knows that he has a problem here; he informs the reader that he later expanded his list from five hundred forty-six to six hundred seven "by adding names that occurred to or were suggested to me" after he assembled the tables he presents in this book—a clear indication, if any were needed, of how inapplicable his statistical methods are to a subject as slippery as this one.

Posner himself is often mystified by the results his methodology produced. He points out that among those in the five hundred forty-six who did not make the top one hundred are Daniel Bell, Allan Bloom, Wayne Booth, Ronald Dworkin, Gertrude Himmelfarb, Robert Putnam, and David Riesman, as well as Nussbaum and Rorty. (Considering how influential many of these thinkers have been to me, you can see how my own sense of accomplishment begins to fade.) But rather than put the blame squarely on his methodology, he attributes this odd outcome to "the undiscriminating, short-memory-span character" of the market for public intellectuals—an odd interpretation considering that George Bernard Shaw, H. G. Wells, Timothy Leary, and C. S. Lewis not only make his short list of public intellectuals but appear among the top thirty-one. The more appropriate reason Posner's results are so often counter-intuitive is because he simply forgot some people, while including others because their field or their political views were close to his own—and because some public intellectuals influence the culture due more to the quality of their work, which is admittedly harder to measure, than to the quantity, which measures all too easily.

Since no list can ever be as good as the larger list from which it is derived, not much ought to be made of Posner's findings. Posner himself says that his list should be "used with the greatest caution," but then he adds that caution should be exercised in making generalizations about the distribution of intellectuals across fields or races. When it comes to the more important question of making generalizations about intellectuals as a whole compared to other groups as a whole, Posner in fact generalizes with wild abandon, rarely stopping to consider the extent to which the basis for his generalizations lacks solidity.

And it is the generalizations made by Posner—the substantive conclusions he wants to reach—that constitute the other reason why I am not very happy to find myself among his top one hundred. For Posner is determined to show that being a public intellectual is no big deal, especially when compared with academic recognition. Each of the five hundred forty-six intellectuals on his list is checked for media citations, Web citations, and scholarly citations. Since public intellectuals who are also academics—there are fifty of them among the top one hundred—have high visibility and usually write well, their work ought to be cited by other scholars. But Posner informs us, after running the appropriate statistical tests, that there is no positive correlation between public visibility and scholarly reputation. And even when some public intellectuals, such as Stephen Jay Gould, are cited by other scholars, they are often cited outside their academic fields. Although the negative correlation between public recognition and academic recognition that he found was not statistically significant, Posner nonetheless concludes that public intellectual work makes little contribution to, and may even detract from, serious academic work.

The "decline" in Posner's subtitle therefore refers to a decline in quality. Posner reaches for as unflattering words as he can find to describe what public intellectuals do: "A proclivity for taking extreme positions, a taste for universals and abstraction, a desire for moral purity, a lack of worldliness, and intellectual arrogance work together to induce in many academic public intellectuals selective empathy, a selective sense of justice, an insensitivity to context, a lack of perspective, a denigration of predecessors as lacking moral insight, an impatience with prudence and sobriety, a lack of realism, and excessive self-confidence." This has all been said before, of course. There exists a long history of diatribes against intellectuals, best represented by Julien Benda's *The Treason of the Intellectuals*, published in 1928. But never before has it been said with correlation coefficients.

II.

THERE IS A problem that requires some explanation here. One individual not on Posner's list is the former Nixon administration official Martin Anderson. True to his libertarian sympathies, Anderson in 1992 published a book called *Imposters in the Temple*, which blamed the inferior quality of academic work on the fact that, protected by tenure and adept at the guild system by which they decide who should join their ranks, professors are immune to the force of the market and, facing no razor of competition, have no incentive to sharpen their ideas. Posner, widely known as a legal scholar who has urged judges to rely more on economic reason to make legal decisions, should be firmly in Anderson's camp. But he is not; and this suggests that Posner is caught between the two objects of his love: the market and the academy. Faced with having to make a choice between them, he opts for the academy, thereby joining a long list of writers who find that they simply cannot abide the results that markets produce.

Posner makes much of the fact that public intellectuals exist in the world of markets, exchanging their ideas for money or (more often) fame. At the same time Posner also finds that the market for public intellectuals is a distorted one: it "operates without any rules or norms, legal or customary ... and, unlike some other information markets, with little in the way of gatekeeping consumer intermediaries," sounding to all the world as if he were defending such gatekeepers as those nefarious consumer-products litigators routinely denounced by conservatives. Moreover, the publications that feature the writings of public intellectuals "do little screening for quality," Posner

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writes, thereby presupposing, against all economic reasoning, that markets are devices to make goods well rather than to make them cheap. Posner manages to chastise commercial publishers for emphasizing the "marketability" of their books, assuming, rather in the spirit of Jonathan Franzen's recent anxieties about the "brow" of his own writing, that popularity is an indication of intellectual and artistic corruption. He even looks with dismay on the fact that university presses are increasingly interested in publishing books that people might actually read. This determined advocate for law and economics has as much snobbish disdain for the commercial aspects of New Grub Street as anyone among the most left-leaning subscribers to public television.

Actually, Posner goes even further than the Upper West Side crowd in his hostility to laissez-faire. The public-intellectual market, in his view, performs "badly" compared with other markets. What the market for public intellectuals lacks, Posner tells us, is "credence goods." For a market to work properly, people need some reassurance that the goods they buy will be of quality. Posner doubts whether the public-intellectual market can provide such reassurance, for "there are no enforceable warranties or other legal sanctions for failing to deliver the promised quality, no effective consumer intermediaries, few reputational sanctions, and, for academics at any rate, no sunk costs—they can abandon the public-intellectual market and have a safe landing as full-time academics."

EVER THE TINKERER, Posner comes up with a plan to make the market for public intellectuals work better—which is to say, to make it work the way he thinks that a market ought to work. Posner would have universities require faculty to post their writings on the university Web page. Each year the Web page's content would be downloaded and sent to libraries around the country. This way, he thinks, anything a public intellectual writes would be out there, available for public inspection. Posner fudges his proposal considerably, waffling back and forth from requiring it to suggesting that it be adopted voluntarily, which is actually a major issue if one believes, as Posner used to believe, that government regulation is often cumbersome and counter-productive.

But the idea behind Posner's proposal is clear enough. "Academics who abuse the privileges that the modern academic career confers, by writing or speaking irresponsibly in the public arena," he writes, "should be hauled before the bar of academic and public opinion." Along similar lines, Posner would regulate what public intellectuals do in ways that are analogues to the ideas of those advocating campaign finance reform; he would have intellectuals disclose all their income from their marketplace activities "in order to enable the public to monitor their honesty and application and their compliance with the rules against financial conflicts of interest." When it comes to a market like the one in which he himself operates, Richard Posner turns out to be a progressive reformer willing to use the powers of government to get the results that he wants.

THE ODDEST ASPECT of this diatribe is that the market for public intellectuals actually works fairly well as it is. To ensure themselves outlets and readers, public intellectuals, who are not quite entertainers in the way that Posner sometimes imagines them to be, have little but their credibility to sell. Let public intellectuals destroy their credibility by taking the extreme and insupportable positions of the sort that Posner believes they inevitably take to gain market share, and the result will be—as Noam Chomsky has discovered by now—that they will be shunned by mainstream publications and confined to the margins of the debate. Contrary to everything that Posner says, the market, as Martin Anderson originally argued, improves the quality of public ideas. And it is not the money that acts as an incentive, though money helps. It is rather the notion that readers are not fools; and so if you want to reach a large number of them, you had better know what you are talking about, and be prepared to defend your ideas against letters to the editor and argumentative e-mails.

Need a sociologist remind an economist, moreover, that tinkering with the way markets work can have unanticipated consequences? One of Posner's proposals would encourage a norm designed to prevent magazines from publishing book reviews by individuals criticized in the book under review, or to require such reviewers to identify the potential conflict of interest. There are a number of problems with this recommendation. Posner seems to assume that readers lack the intelligence to find out for themselves whether the reviewer might be biased. He also believes that it is relatively easy to determine what criticism is. (Posner makes a number of references to me in his book, some of them supportive, some of them critical, so I am not sure whether, under his proposal, I would be required to disclose what I just disclosed.) But the most serious objection to his proposal is that, if followed scrupulously, it would quash the exchange of ideas, leading writers to avoid criticizing anyone who might be a potential reviewer and leading reviewers to avoid books that they have a natural interest in discussing. It is hard to imagine any reform that would take a relatively well-functioning market and subject it to the predictable dead hand of the planner more completely than the one that Posner suggests.

III.

RICHARD POSNER'S DISDAIN for the market in ideas makes sense only against his love of academic standards. Like Marjorie Garber, whose work Posner never cites, and who is also left off his list of five hundred forty-six, Posner contrasts the professionalization of the academy with the amateurism of the public intellectual—and much prefers the former. One reason public intellectuals are in decline is that academic specialization is in the ascendancy. As he puts it, "Philosophy, economics, sociology, psychology, anthropology, and history are all fields that, like literary criticism, or for that matter, astronomy, were once far less technical and specialized, thus far more open to intelligent contributions from amateurs, than they have become." For this reason, we can no longer have many figures such as George Orwell because each of the many areas in which he worked—literary criticism, ethnography, political science—is now dominated by experts. Public intellectuals, Posner writes, trade scope in return for power; academics, by implication, renounce power in order to gain depth.

Although he distances himself somewhat from arguments in favor of pure specialization, Posner frequently contrasts scholars with intellectuals in ways that are invidious to the latter. "High up on the norm hierarchy of the scientific community," he writes, "are accuracy, open-mindedness, disinterest, and logicality," all of which leading public intellectuals "flout." Public intellectuals could be found on all sides of the Florida electoral debacle of 2000, but Posner singles out those who were shocked by what they witnessed, only to condemn their "emotionality," which stood "in particularly striking contrast to the official image of the academic."

Scholars, who pride themselves on their mastery of method, tend to look down on public intellectuals as people who just cannot make it in the more rarefied world of academic scholarship, and Posner sympathizes with them. "Other things being equal," he writes, "we would expect the ablest scholars to be the least drawn to the career of a public intellectual." Posner goes on to say that other things are not equal, but he circles back again to his main point. Some famous scholars do become public intellectuals,

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but generally at the end of their careers, when they no longer have the capacity for sustained work.

The purpose of these frequent contrasts is to underscore what Posner thinks his correlation coefficients reveal: the quality of the academic market is superior to the quality of the market for public intellectuals. But what kind of market is the academic market? To make an effective comparison between the market for scholars and the market for public intellectuals, Posner ought to say something about the supply and demand of the former; but he never subjects the academy to the scrutiny that he imposes upon public intellectuals. Of course the academy is not, strictly speaking, his subject in this book; he is writing about public intellectuals. But it is Posner who introduces the comparison in the first place, so it would not have been that difficult for him to draw up a list of scholars who disdain writing for the general public—people, in short, like John Rawls—and find some method for comparing the quality of their work with the quality of those who believe that academics—who are paid, one way or another, by the public—have an obligation to give the public something in return.

Were these two markets directly compared, I have no idea which one would come out looking better. But it is still preferable to make the comparison than simply to assume, as Posner does, that one must have higher standards than the other. Grounds for thinking that the hypothesis ought to be tested are furnished by the many examples of hiring decisions made by universities that suggest the possibility of market failure. In *Making Harvard Modern*, Morton and Phyllis Keller recount how members of the department of history at that university, persuaded that no one out there was quite as good as themselves, passed over C. Vann Woodward and Richard Hofstadter for appointments and settled instead on Frank Friedel. And members of Harvard's department of political science horse-traded appointments, blending conservatives and liberals, or devotees of one approach and followers of another approach, in order to achieve consensus.

A similar pattern continues until the present day. Harvard recently hired Homi K. Bhabha away from Posner's beloved University of Chicago. (Bhabha is on Posner's larger list, though not on his smaller one.) Whatever one thinks of Bhabha's scholarship—his prose is the very model of academic jargon so frequently ridiculed by public intellectuals—it is difficult to believe that Harvard simply wanted to hire the best possible person that it could find to raise the quality of its English department. Whenever elite universities make hiring or tenure decisions, quality is the public criterion—but faddishness, contacts, race, ethnicity, ideology, and envy are the unspoken but nonetheless decisive criteria.

There is no reason to conclude, without examining any evidence, that the standards by which strictly scholarly work is judged are higher than those by which the work of public intellectuals is judged. Commercial publishers decide whether to accept a manuscript based on a guess about how many consumers might buy it. Academic presses, at least in theory, accept a manuscript because it has been given positive reviews by at least two scholars in the author's field. Can we really be sure that the latter procedure produces better quality? In many fields, the number of specialists is so small that reviewers have been known to praise a manuscript because they like the author, or want to curry favor, or expect a similarly positive review in return. (This is not the case with Posner's book, which was published by a university press: someone I know was one of the anonymous reviewers, and he is not only a scholar of considerable impartiality and discerning judgment, he is also an exemplary public intellectual, although he can be found on none of Posner's lists.) As with university presses, so with many journals, where, if anything, the range of available experts is even smaller. To be sure, prospects for commercial success may not produce better results, but it is also the case that books published by trade houses, like articles published in magazines of opinion, get much better editing and much tougher reviews than many an academic production.

Since the market for scholarship has its own flaws, Posner's comparisons between it and the market for public intellectuals quickly begin to crumble. Posner rightly points out, often with considerable relish, that there are academics with tenure who have all but given up scholarship for the sake of public recognition. But he does not emphasize that there are a surprising number of non-academic public intellectuals who make contributions to academic scholarship, including Ian Buruma, Garry Wills, and Jack Miles. When all is said and done, Posner's book is more about celebrity than about accomplishment, and the interesting question of whether there is any relationship between them is not a question that he ever considers.

POSNER IS BOTH an academic (he is a federal judge who retains an affiliation at the University of Chicago) and a public intellectual. (He ranks himself seventieth among the one hundred leading public intellectuals, between John Kenneth Galbraith and Ralph Ellison, but, unlike many other public intellectuals on his list, he also ranks high on the list of scholarly citations, although that may be because law professors cite each other so copiously.) So how should his own work about public intellectuals be judged?

By his own criteria—accuracy, open-mindedness, those kinds of attributes—Posner is not a very scholarly social scientist. One of the first rules of the scientific temperament involves an alertness to one's own possible fallibility, hardly a characteristic of Posner's approach. Quite the contrary. He rushes into print with problematic data, and he brooks no doubt about the proper conclusion to be drawn from his data. And so on the crucial point of whether the market for public intellectuals "is performing badly compared to other markets in symbolic goods, particularly the academic market," he tells his readers that "the theory and the statistics buttress the anecdotes; the trio of proofs is convincing." No serious social scientist would be so quick to reach such a judgment—and to announce it with so few qualifications, as if, because the evidence cannot speak for itself, the person who presents the evidence must speak on its behalf. Scientific modesty compels the conclusion that the anecdotes are scattered, the theory impoverished, and the data absurd.

Since Posner writes more like a public intellectual than like a scholar, does his own contribution to the genre support or contradict his assertions about the decline in quality of this way of dealing with ideas? The answer that immediately springs to mind is that Posner confirms his own thesis. It is not just the slapdash quality of his methodology or the breathtaking scope of his unproven generalizations that offend notions of quality. Rather than sustaining an argument from beginning to end, his book is sloppily put together, cutting and pasting from essays written for other occasions whether or not they are directly relevant to the topic at hand. The editing is often terrible, allowing the same thoughts to be repeated from one page to the next.

Posner has a voracious intellectual curiosity and a discipline for work rivaled by almost nobody in the United States. He is clearly capable of writing books that would meet anyone's standards for thoroughness. Instead he hastens his books into print as quickly as he hastens his data to conclusions, and their quality inevitably suffers. If this book is representative of what public intellectuals do, I can well understand his reservations about them. Still, I am reluctant to conclude that Posner is so anxious to prove his point about the low quality of public-intellectual work

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that he wrote a book designed to confirm it.

I have no way of knowing what his motivations are for writing, but I would seriously doubt that he presents his ideas for either money or fame. I would prefer to believe that Posner writes books because he is consumed with ideas and wants to persuade others of their validity. Whether he is good or bad in his efforts has nothing to do with the market in which he operates. It has everything to do with the quality of his mind and the care with which he presents his arguments. If the latter were up to the standards of the former, Posner's book would have made a valuable contribution to American letters. Instead he leaves his readers frustrated as much by his unexamined convictions as by his data-cloaked glibness. ■

The Devil You Know

By DALE PECK

The Devil's Larder by Jim Crace

(Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 165 pp., $20)

THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN curiosity and promiscuity is much the same for writers as it is for lovers. The first is a good thing, the second bad, the line between the two rather blurry. At what point is inquisitiveness revealed to be a wandering eye, an inability to focus or to commit?

Over the past fifteen years, the British novelist Jim Crace has wooed an international audience with six clever tales about a fictitious continent, a Stone Age society, a fruit market, a shipwreck, an adolescent Jesus, and dead people. Yet each new book has had the effect of reducing rather than enlarging his oeuvre. Awards have been given, comparisons made to J.M. Coetzee, Jeanette Winterson, even Borges. Those comparisons strike me as oddly apt, for Crace amplifies the worst traits of each of those great but problematic writers. Crace is a Coetzee for those fascinated by the pornography of perverse behavior rather than perverse thought, a Winterson for those who pray that such thoughts can be explained away on the psychotherapist's couch, a Borges for readers who want to believe that paradoxes and labyrinths and infinity are nothing more than literary concepts.

With his seventh work of fiction, *The Devil's Larder*, Crace turns his attention to gastronomy, and the result finally exposes him for the gourmand that he is. No David Bouley, Crace stands as the Betty Crocker of contemporary novelists: though the packaging promises devil's food, angel food, and German chocolate, the desiccated contents of each box taste remarkably the same. Taken on their own, Crace's novels are inoffensive; their popularity is unfortunate, but not hard to understand. As a body of work, however, their lowest-common-denominator dilettantism is the embodiment of everything that I have come to despise about contemporary fiction.

I did not arrive at this admittedly extreme opinion after reading *The Devil's Larder*, which served as my introduction to Crace's books. Certainly it is a slight book. Billed as "sixty-four short fictions about food," its sum is, if anything, less than its parts, such that one emerges from the text with little to add to the jacket description of the book. There are sixty-four pieces; they are short (ranging from two words to ten pages); they are, to the best of my knowledge, fiction; they all feature food. They are also linked by the fact that they seem to be set in the same place—the coastal village where the protagonists of *Being Dead* were murdered, perhaps, or one of the towns of his unnamed *Continent*? It is impossible to say, just as it is unclear what to make of repeated references to "Mondazy," the fictitious (and terrible) poet who also featured in *Being Dead*.

The stories in *The Devil's Larder* defy paraphraxis, like Aesop or Lydia Davis at their insipid worst. Here is one:

> He kept a curved plate in the middle of his kitchen table, with carvings on its edge. The sun, the moon, some leaves, some stars. It wasn't old or valuable, but it was natural wood, unvarnished and hand decorated. Each day, first thing, once he had done his lifts and bends, he placed his titbits on the plate, food to see off death. Pumpkin seeds to protect the prostate. Bran for bowels. Brazil nuts for their selenium. Dried apricots. French pitted prunes. Linseed. A tomato. There were no supplements or vitamins. He had no confidence in pills. Then he drank his green-leaf tea with honey from the comb. He was a regimented man, well organized, reliable. He kept his diet up, without a break, until the day he died.

Here is another:

> Spitting in the omelette is a fine revenge. Or overloading it with pepper. But take care not to masturbate into the mix, as someone in the next village did, sixty years ago. The eggs got pregnant. When he heated them they grew and grew, becoming quick and lumpy, until they could outwit him (and all his hungry guests waiting with beer and bread out in the yard) by leaping from the pan with their half-wings and running down the lane like boys.

Here is a third:

> A migraine is a certain sign, that you should drink a case of wine. Is that confusing? No, just a lesson to be learned; that pain is fine if it's been earned, by boozing.

That last one is printed in fake handwriting, suggestively childish or drunken. The words are typeset in the shape of a bottle of chianti.

These pieces remind me of only two things that I have read before. The first is Jay McInerney's *Model Behavior*, an unbelievably bad collection of stories whose adolescent adventures range from the immature to the merely amateur, and whose most remarkable feature is that someone actually published it. The second is a short story sent to me by an imprisoned sex offender who had accepted Jesus Christ as his personal Lord and Savior. In that story, a veterinarian feels guilty about euthanizing a suffering dog and is rewarded by a canine smile and wag of the dog's tail when he sends it to meet its maker. In McInerney's stories and the prisoner's story, there can be seen the sense of discovery familiar to anyone who has ever read one of those "aha!" paragraphs that end so much fiction in college workshops: this isn't as hard as I thought!

Never mind that in Crace's first story it is impossible to tell whether the "carvings" adorn plate or table (syntax leans toward the former, grammar toward the latter). Never mind that in the second story the "fine revenge" lacks an object and the clos-

DALE PECK's most recent novel is *Now It's Time to Say Goodbye* (Farrar, Straus & Giroux).

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ing simile "like boys" prompts a similarly unanswerable question, namely, why? And never mind that in the third story the ironic "lesson" of the second half is linked to the first half by rhyme rather than reason, making it a proposition as indefensible—and unassailable—as the statement "all dogs are blue." What matters in the Cracian universe is only that the elements are arrayed in an order that resembles fiction, and that this imitation yields a simulacrum of what purports to be wisdom.

But the semblance is too canny. Stories such as these always bring to mind a set of "prehistoric" cave drawings found in France a few years ago. Owing to their accurate depiction of the movement of the legs of running animals, the drawings were proved inauthentic: it was not until the invention of stop-motion photography that humans were able to ascertain how a horse's or deer's legs bent and lifted and came down during flight. The drawings, in other words, did not imitate life, they imitated art; and the same inauthenticity plagues the stories in *The Devil's Larder*. The short sentences masquerading as careful prose, the resonant observations that turn out to be nothing more than artless tricks of language, the use of enough irony to avoid appearing recherché: these are not stories, these are imitations of stories.

My point is not merely that Crace's new book is bad, but rather that in its exclusively banal view of life, death, sex, and art, in its solemn pseudo-minimalist belief that any trivial detail, earnestly presented, is filled with significance, and in its reference librarian's elevation of facts to totems, it is so bad that I began to suspect that Crace might actually have talent. Fiction, after all, requires a monomania: the concentration to winnow away the real world until all that remains is its outline, leaving the story neatly defined by negative space. Perhaps these "short fictions" were bits of chipped stone mistakenly put on display, and Crace's Galatea lay elsewhere. And so I read five more of his books, *Continent*, *The Gift of Stones*, *Signals of Distress*, *Quarantine*, and *Being Dead*. I began each one optimistically, thinking that I might discover in it Crace's hidden ability or appeal. I like Crace's subjects. I like their variety and idiosyncrasy and audacity. That is why my disappointment grew greater and greater when each successive book proved as stale as *The Devil's Larder*.

Look again at the story about Crace's "regimented man." The prose is detached, observational, objectifying its one-dimensional protagonist; now imagine that effect extended over two hundred or three hundred pages. What is merely boring at one hundred twenty-nine words is, well, *really* boring at fifty thousand words. There is no investment in such a world, such characters, because it is not in fact a world, and they are not actually characters; they are nothing more than shadow puppets projected on a barren wall. In fact, what I realized after reading three or four of Crace's novels is not that they are bad novels, but that they are not novels. This is because they are not stories. In truth, they are not even imitations of stories. They are just extended metaphors that Crace tries to pass off as stories.

Before reading Crace, this was a distinction that I had never thought to make. Metaphors, after all, often take the form of anecdotes, and all stories have a metaphoric rendering, usually called theme. But there is a difference. A story, as Forster brutally reduced it in *Aspects of the Novel*, is nothing more than two events separated by time, whereas a metaphor is two events separated by distance. Very often that distance is mental—more specifically, it is desire, the yearning between what we want and what we have. But there is no desire in narrative. Time may be relentless, but not in the manner of a serial killer; it doesn't want to go forward, it simply goes. It is not momentous, it is momentless; and thus the more a story seems to desire to achieve its conclusion, rather than simply to arrive there, the further it strays from its true purpose, which I will call the accurate presentation of time.

Desire in narrative is an authorial intrusion as artificial as any hat trick by Barth or Barthelme. It is also human, and sacred, the age-old urge to make things make sense, to shape historical events into something more than points on a line: it is what characters do, but not writers. The speeding up that we associate with the end of a good novel represents a transformation of the character's psychology, not the writer's psychology; the Oedipal urge to finally discover the truth, even if it destroys you. There are any number of great writers who document that urge without giving in to it themselves, but when a writer does give in to it, the work becomes tinged with sentimentality, the cloying poetry of hymns as opposed to the ecstasy of singing voices.

For the reader, the distinction between an extended metaphor and an actual story translates into the difference between boredom and pleasure, between passive observation and intellectual engagement. It is the difference between a tapestry and a weaving: the former is a finished product, the relationship between its parts fixed and geometrical, whereas the latter is an ongoing process that advances along ordered lines while still containing the possibility of diversion and variation—a multitude of potential tapestries, in other words, as opposed to a single scene that gathers dust on a wall.

In an attempt to achieve such a multiplicity of meaning, Crace entangles each of his so-called stories within a more or less complicated modernist framework, hoping that the act of unraveling the narrative will add what it does not actually contain, namely, a semblance of humanity. But Crace's juxtaposition and cross-cutting do not jar you into rethinking your position with regard to what you are reading; they simply conceal or prop up the narrative's lack of spontaneity, suspense, or surprise. Similarly, double spaces and chapter breaks, the pregnant pauses of typography, do nothing more than elide those places where characters might be expected to show something more than actorly "motivation": free will, choice.

When all else fails, Crace trots out the good old direct address to the reader: "I expect you smile and brighten in expectation of some fantasy of mine"; "The young man in his suit—whose name you'll know before the day is out—was left [behind]." "This is our only prayer," he writes in *Being Dead*, the conspiratorial "we" that is even more powerful—and more desperate—than the gentler "you." But when "you" bracket off these insinuations and remind yourself that "you" and Crace do not in fact form any kind of "we," "you" find yourself presented time and again with the same static picture. In six books, I never saw anything break out of the ordered mold of Crace's extended, reified metaphors. One is reminded that they are called conceits.

In his first novel, *Continent*, a kind of *Utopia* lite, seven vignettes of an invented continent reveal a land that bears no appreciable difference from the six continents that already exist. The worldly son of a wealthy man tells how his father sells the urine of hermaphroditic cows as magic "milk"; a man is imprisoned for speaking against the government; a visiting teacher uses the logic of topography to outrace an over-confident young buck on his horse; a scientist discovers a primitive tribe whose women seem to go into estrus; an elderly calligrapher tells how forgeries of his work sell for thousands of dollars in the outside world; electricity comes to a rural town with comically disastrous consequences; a foreign geologist doesn't want to discover anything valuable that might lead to the destruction of an unspoiled landscape. In each case, the vignettes plod toward their foreordained conclusion, their themes relentlessly borne out in every single line, their characters accruing not depth but parts, like cars on an assembly line. In Edmund White's

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novel *Forgetting Elena*, an older writer chastises a younger writer for placing a chandelier in a ballroom for no other reason than having it around to drop on the characters at the story's climax. The elements in *Continent* are similarly perfunctory, the utter redundancy of each tale never questioned. Superstition persists in the face of science, oppressive governments are bad, the tortoise always beats the hare, and so on. It takes a novel to say this?

And so on: *Being Dead* utilizes a cut-and-paste technique to elevate a pseudo-scientific poetics of decay into a sort of afterlife for the otherwise uninteresting elderly couple murdered in its opening pages. They rot amid flashbacks of their past until their self-centered daughter discovers them and is sad. In its self-important presentation, Crace's tedious inter-cutting seems ignorant of anything written during the twentieth century. Instead his characters remain dead, the life beaten not just from their bodies but from his flashbacks, which are nothing more than synopsis or summary, plot points for a film script.

Quarantine's framing device, by contrast, is purely conceptual. This "historical" novel postulates a Jesus whose forty-day fast in the desert was a bit of adolescent drama designed to prove to disapproving parents that his faith wasn't, like, weird. But if you still want to, like, believe in all that God stuff, that's cool, too, because after he starves to death—Jesus is a man; and men cannot live for forty days without food; ergo, Jesus did not live for forty days without food—people choose to pretend that he did not die, and even to pretend that he worked miracles, too. Is Crace attempting to disprove Christianity? To expose its hypocrisy, and offer a psychological alternative to immaculate conception? It is impossible to say. Despite the fact that the narrative's central character is a boy called Jesus, he bears no relation to the historical and mythological figure of the same name; and by the same token Crace's novel fails to demonstrate any serious engagement with the faith that it is supposedly unmasking. This is not a retelling of a myth; Crace is simply ignoring what has gone before. He might as well walk into a church and tell the congregation that they all believe a lie. Whatever its philosophical merit, such a declaration would hardly count as literature.

In *Signals of Distress*, a village of idiots run around like a bunch of Tom and Jerrys for two hundred seventy-five pages, until a group of them get on a ship, which then sinks. Isn't that ironic? Or unfortunate? Distressing, perhaps? But hey: the announcement of the ship's sinking is typeset as though it were a photocopy of a page torn from the 1837 edition of *Oliver's Register of Ships and Shipping*. Who knows, maybe it really is a page from the 1837 edition of *Oliver's Register of Ships and Shipping*. Isn't that *something*?

In each case, Crace's intensely sharpened focus—the man is nothing if not narrow-minded—presents a piece of the world as isolated as his regimented man with his all-natural diet, and then, through anachronism, anthropomorphism, and sleight of hand, that fragment is turned into something slightly different from what it was before, a photograph dropped from history's scrapbook and begging for an exegesis that it does not deserve. This is because Crace refuses to admit that the novel qua novel can make a distinction between invention and reality, between recorded history and lived history. In fiction, there is no such thing as non-fiction, as empirical truth, even as something to be referred to, invoked. It *all* becomes fiction. Critics often speak of the "blurred line" between fiction and non-fiction, but Crace seems not to understand that the blurriness isn't static—that there isn't a line at all, but rather a dialogue about the elusive goal of perfect knowledge and the imperfect tool that seeks it, the human mind.

For Crace, it is all a game: "The truth is dull and half-asleep. But lies are nimble, spirited, alive. And lying is a craft." So says the narrator of Crace's second novel, *The Gift of Stones*. It is perhaps the most useful novel to examine in detail because it contains a storyteller as its central character, and as such is full of pronouncements like the above. "Of course, man must eat and food for me was earned by talk. I did invent for them another breed of tales"; "When he spoke he shaped the truth, he trimmed, he stretched, he decorated. He was to truth what every stoney was to untouched flint"; "You see? I've pulled a screen of grass around the story too. I'll not creep up and tell you what I saw. You can be sure this is the truth—no chronicler with any sense would disappoint his listeners so."

In fact, though the foreground of this wildly ambitious story ostensibly examines what happens when a vastly superior product (versatile, malleable bronze) is introduced into a Stone Age economy dominated by clumsy and unreliable flint implements, in the background we witness an even more radical innovation: the invention of storytelling itself. Crace is imagining the birth of the selfsame conventions that Homer would use 3,500 years later to transform a few fragments of folklore into a culture-defining myth. But where Homer wrote big, Crace writes small. Here a literal interpretation of the term "Stone Age" creates the entire world of his novel, whose unnamed protagonist lives in a village of "the stoneys and the mongers, the villagers who dug and worked the flint, the traders who hawked and peddled it."

It is unclear whether this economic stratification is meant to register as an intuitive re-creation of how life might have been lived six thousand years ago or is simply anachronistic, but in either case life in the village seems eerily Dickensian. "You'll never guess," the protagonist says, speaking of profiteering middlemen and hardworking stonemasons, "which breed was fat and wealthy, which gave the orders, which named the price, which did not stand and shiver in the line with baskets full of earth." It is the protagonist's misfortune not only to have been born into this world as a worker rather than a capitalist, but also to lose an arm as a child. Useless as a laborer, he must find a new way to earn his keep, or at least to secure handouts sufficient to his survival.

He becomes a bard. It happens this way. One afternoon he sees a ship (*deus ex machina*) and follows it along the shore. He loses the ship but meets a hermit woman (*deus ex machina*) who supports herself and her daughter by working as a prostitute; when he returns to the village he responds to demands about where he has been with a story that his audience, though sophisticated enough to recognize his words as a mixture of truth and falseness, is nevertheless enraptured by (*deus ex machina*).

> One good story from his mouth transformed him in that village, overnight, from the wild plant, not-much-use, into their raconteur. . . .
>
> And so it was that father became—not liked exactly, or respected—but useful in the village, and admired by some. You'd meet him, too, at a great occasion, celebrating with a tale the naming of a child or marking death and burial with some fitting yarn. And there were hardly any feasts or meetings of the village which did not feature father fantasizing at the higher table in the hall.

And—*deus ex machina*—the modern story is born, as fully formed as Athena sprung from Zeus's skull.

Note, again, the nineteenth-century inflection: the protagonist (father to the novel's narrator, who would seem to have inherited her father's skill) is neither liked nor respected but *useful*. This strikes me as the same sort of pseudo-rationality for which Dickens lampooned Bentham, that Huxley and Wells found so alarming in More's *Utopia*. The narrative in *The Gift of Stones* progresses with the well-oiled order of a clock's hands, but it is believable

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as a blueprint for a human society only if you believe in neither chance nor free will.

The protagonist returns for Doe, as he calls the woman he met on the beach, and she tells him that her husband disappeared on an errand to his village. But when the protagonist uses his newfound storytelling prowess to ask his fellow citizens about it, "they peeled away before the tale was done, unmoved by father's portrait of the widow and her child on the heath. My father stood alone and startled—for now he understood the power of the truth." But what is that power? And how has it worked? Why are the villagers willing to pay for one story but not the other? If they were somehow responsible for the husband's disappearance, one could attribute their lack of interest to guilt, but that doesn't appear to be the case. The only thing that comes close to providing an answer is, again, anachronism: the villagers' taste runs to inconsequential fantasy rather than heavier stuff, just like today's fickle, faint-hearted media consumers. *Deus ex machina.*

Crace's story makes his point too conveniently, too simplistically; it exists not only without nuance but also without alternative, and as such is a reductive look at both his invented world and the real world it's supposedly commenting on. And it doesn't affect anything anyway: Doe continues to work as a prostitute, with the men of the village as her clientele, and the narrator continues to tell stories until, conveniently enough, another ship returns, discharging sailors who kill Doe with an arrow tipped with the bronze implement promised in the jacket copy. Within a page, bronze tools are everywhere, in the kind of market saturation for which Bill Gates would kill. The villagers abandon their quarries, presumably in hopes of finding a place far away from the dreaded innovation. And as they embark on their great trek into—or away from?—the past, they turn to the protagonist "to invent a future for us all."

HERE, AGAIN, IS the "aha!" moment of the tiny tales in *The Devil's Larder*, the same messianic urge that lurks behind *Quarantine* and *Being Dead*. History disappears beneath memory's distortions. Only perception remains. So one might as well have a story that tidies things up, that inspires hope, right? Fiction is a balm, a sop even. On bad days, when everything I write seems inconsequential or meaningless, I have thought as much; but I'm not sure that Crace allows fiction even that much life. What little compassion I had for his work disappeared when I read the following interview with him in the last issue of *Bookforum*:

> People are baffled when they hear me prefer journalism over fiction. But I'm equally baffled that anyone could inspect the array of subjects highlighted by serious newspapers, note the size and variety of their readerships, consider the role they play in providing the source material of our opinions, and still consider the literary novel an equal force. Of course, narrative literature increases in importance when newspapers don't or aren't allowed to do their job. I couldn't argue that Russian newspapers of the cold war period represent a better record of their times than the novels of Pasternak or Solzhenitsyn, for example. And narrative literature can be immensely important among communities that are marginalized or misrepresented by newspapers. I could make a good case for the gay novel, the black novel, the feminist novel of the last fifty years. But these are novels with alert constituencies as well as plain readers. Now, step back, consider me, consider Britain. A white, middle-aged, heterosexual male in a bourgeois, liberal democracy. Where is my constituency? How can my thin novels, with their overload of rhythmic metaphors and their few thousand readers, claim equal importance with newspapers? Poets (and novelists) are "the unacknowledged legislators of the world"? Not anymore, they're not. Come on, you self-deluding writers, get a grip!

This is perhaps the most damning confession ever made by a novelist. It is not simply a statement of bad faith; it is also an admission that he has no idea what a novel is, what a novel does.

The problem with most contemporary novelists is that they seem to have forgotten the basic ontological difference between history and fiction—that one is real and the other is made up; and so they write their smug "realist" novels with no indication of the unbridgeable gap that separates their flights of fancy from the horrific trajectories of actual aircraft. Crace, admirably, does not pretend to record history in his novels. But he does seem to think that the measure of any narrative's "importance" is its ability to do so. And so, convinced before he sets out that his novels cannot "claim equal importance" with newspapers, he allows fact and fiction to dissolve into each other like sugar in water, leaving a sticky residue on everything they touch.

This is just another variation of the inferiority complex felt by a select group of contemporary novelists—all that bleating by David Foster Wallace and Jonathan Franzen about their lack of connection to the thing that they call "the culture"—but which, on examination, turns out to be nothing more than a denigration of fiction for not being something it was never meant to be. And trotting out poor old Shelley to defend your opinion is an insult to the poet's memory, not to mention the kind of literal-mindedness that ought to disqualify one from being a poet (or a novelist). For a man who writes nothing but metaphors, Crace has no idea how they work.

I am not, at this late date, going to suggest that fiction is or is not as important as history. That is a question for a metaphysician (or a novelist). All I want to point out is that fiction does not record history, or compete with it. Fiction interprets history. It was history, in fact, that originally aspired to fiction, not the other way around. "What happened" was considered less important than what posterity made of it, an impossible-to-untangle skein of truth, lies, mistakes, and something like what we would now call "spin"; what made *The Iliad* so vital to its listeners wasn't its truth value, perceived or actual, but rather its ability to tell its listeners what it meant to be Greek, a lesson so historically resonant that everyone from Virgil to Dante to Dos Passos has used it as a model for what fiction can aspire to. It was not until Suetonius began writing his biographies of the Caesars around the first century C.E. that objectivity and subjectivity began to separate into two distinct genres, the former reifying itself into history, the latter mutating through any number of forms into what we call—inadequately, vaguely—fiction.

Like Potter Stewart and pornography, I can't tell you what fiction is, but I know it when I see it. Fiction does not make meaning by reifying ideas, because you cannot reify something that does not exist. Instead, it establishes a series of contextual relationships in which meaning is vested in a number of elements: writer and reader, invented and actual, shapely narrative and shapeless history. Ultimately fiction speaks to the narrativizing heart in all of us while gently admonishing that history has no such neatness, none of the inevitabilities of climax, resolution, and dénouement with which religion or politics or art comforts us.

The novelist treats the facts of history as a juggler treats his balls, rather than as a rock climber treats his pegs: it's the amount of time he can keep away from them that is most fascinating, not the amount of time he spends clinging for dear life. The novelist does not tell lies. He unmasks the truth. He does not provide sheltering illusions. He dispels them. If Jim Crace, the former journalist, thinks that journalism does something more important than this, then he should get on a plane to Jalalabad right now. He'll have to hurry if he wants to make it before the shooting's over. ■

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WASHINGTON DIARIST

Unsilent Night

IT'S CHRISTMAS, FESTIVE SEASON of goodwill, time of sparkling delight for the little ones, and... arggggghhhhhhh, how many hundred chores left? For parents of young kids, the run-up to Christmas is the most exhausting period of the year. A dozen large boxes of decorations and lights to string. Two trees in our household, plus miniatures for each kid's room. The Tyranny of the Presents: dozens of relatives are present-qualified in our extended family group, and each of the five of us gives an average of 2.5 gifts to each, meaning uncountable gifts to buy or make. Plus toy drives and Secret Santa events, parties to attend, parties to give, stockings to stuff, the wrapping of those uncountable gifts, rehearsals for the pageant (our offspring are two camels and a shepherd this year), all the while regular homework and housework and income work continue. By Christmas morning, my wife Nan and I are in a state of pure fatigue. Then the event goes by in a blur and it's time to start cleaning up. As a child, my favorite moment each year was Christmas Eve, when bells were ringing and everything was in prospect. As a parent, my favorite moment each year comes around the morning of December 29, when I've finally caught up on sleep.

OF COURSE I FEEL GRATEFUL TO LIVE in a place and time when it is common to hear people complain about *too many* presents. The year 2001 has reminded Americans what really matters in life, how petty and fleeting most of what we grumble about is, how thankful we should feel to be up at 2 a.m. wrapping gifts for children who live in liberty and prosperity. The only real problem with overdoing the holidays is that not everyone can. One-fifth of our country lives near or below the poverty line, while one billion worldwide are destitute, and perhaps two billion more barely get by. Everyone at THE NEW REPUBLIC was also reminded of what really matters by the recent announcement that our dear colleague and former editor Michael Kinsley has Parkinson's disease; he is doing well. My initial reaction to word of Kinsley's health was that we have now had enough of being reminded what really matters in life.

EACH SEASON, SOMEONE PROPOSES making the holidays less stuff-oriented. There are calls for a national commitment to asceticism. No parties, no presents, switch off the colored lights; a few years ago Bill McKibben devoted an entire book to scolding people for spending more than $100 on Christmas. But proposing no holiday spending is about as practical as proposing a ban on foul language. People *like* parties and surprises in shiny paper. Life is short; we should enjoy it by doing things we like. The challenge is not to eradicate seasonal materialism, but to put it into perspective.

MY SUGGESTION: FOLLOW A STANDARD that for each dollar spent on self, family, and friends during the holidays, another dollar is given to the needy or to charity. Had a good year? More power to you! Celebrate with lots of presents—but give an equal amount to those who did not have a good year. Giving away as much as you spend would naturally reduce holiday excess, while making the parties and gift-giving that still happen more enjoyable, since they would come with a clear conscience. Families and groups of friends who subscribed to this idea would know they were not only indulging themselves—and nothing wrong with that—but helping others as well. It has always seemed to me that this idea could catch on if promoted from the pulpits of America as a formula for enjoying Christmas while keeping the day in spiritual perspective. All the plan needs is a catchy name. Two-For-One Christmas is the best I've been able to come up with. Please, couldn't some marketing whiz find what Malcolm Gladwell calls a "sticky" way to advance my idea?

AT LEAST CHRISTMAS SHOPPING HEADaches are palliated by the arrival of the Web. I placed our orders for Harry Potter paraphernalia early by computer, and now the stuff just comes to our door—no battling mobs at the mall. But speaking as someone who has been using Amazon.com pretty much since the day its portal opened, I sense an alarming trend in Web retailing. Around Thanksgiving Amazon started running bright banners promising free shipping for orders exceeding $99. I placed an order exceeding $99 and was hit with an $11 shipping charge. I e-mailed customer service—once in Seattle, now in Bangalore, India—and got a reply telling me I hadn't read the offer's fine print closely enough. THEY LINKED ME TO THE FINE PRINT, which ran 403 words. You had to order *either* $99 worth of toys *or* $99 worth of non-toy merchandise. Aha, I had ordered $99 worth of toys. But, using Amazon's vaunted 1-Click, I'd foolishly also ordered a Christmas CD. That's not a toy, and invalidated the deal; essentially, I was charged extra for spending more. "In the future, please pay close attention to the promotional guidelines before placing an order," I was admonished by customer service rep "Chuck P." (The Bangalore staff uses anglicized pseudonyms; you're not supposed to know customer service is outsourced to another hemisphere.) In its early years Amazon relentlessly hyped itself as a company that was sensitive to customers and enlightened to workers. But as Jonathan Cohn explained in these pages (see "The Jungle," February 19), it gradually became a company hostile to workers. The next step in corporate decline is turning on your customers, which Amazon seems poised to do. Of course, if this Web leader adopts a new philosophy of conning customers, Wall Street may applaud.

I WILL BANISH SUCH COMMERCIAL thoughts from my mind as I watch the Christmas pageant, hoping our six-year-old, Spenser, doesn't muff his line: "We are camels from the East." The suburban Washington church we attend, Bradley Hills, is a joint Christian-Jewish place of worship. As the weekend begins, the sanctuary is used by Bethesda Jewish, a Reform congregation. On Sundays, Presbyterians take over. Classrooms, meeting halls, and finances are shared. I wish similar arrangements were more common. One of the shortcomings of Christianity is that most adherents downplay the faith's interweaving with Judaism. It is far from clear whether Jesus meant to create a new faith, reform an ancient one, or move the world beyond religion as such. But how can anyone understand 2,000 years of Christianity without the 3,000 years of Jewish life and thought from which it arose? The Bradley Hills sanctuary has crosses, and also Stars of David; I find it pleasant to imagine that my Redeemer would feel at home there. At the hub of the campus, the dual congregation is building a special "sacred space," mainly for Reform ceremonies. When that work is done, Bradley Hills will in literal terms be a Christian church with a Jewish church at its center, a perfect representative of the story of my faith. And a perfect place for a pageant depicting the birth of an itinerant Jew who never owned a thing, wrote a thing, or held any office, yet changed history.

GREGG EASTERBROOK

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A Public Interest Journal

ENERGY: Which Way Will We Go?

Americans must choose an energy future. No decision facing us today has greater implications for the health of our economy, our communities, and the environment that sustains us.

Which way will we go?

The White House energy plan is a fraud, nothing more than payback for campaign contributions from oil, coal, gas and nuclear industry cronies. It would protect their profits and perpetuate their pollution at public expense.

In advocating their plan, President Bush, Vice President Cheney, and their allies in Congress demonstrate profound dishonesty and disloyalty to the genuine national interest.

If you think that's a harsh conclusion, read the "Clean Energy Blueprint" from the **Union of Concerned Scientists**, the **American Council for an Energy Efficient Economy**, and the **Tellus Institute** (online at **www.UCSUSA.org**).

The Blueprint weighs the costs and benefits of the "business-as-usual" approach embodied in the Bush plan against those of a package of common sense, clean-energy policies.

- Under the Bush plan, only 2.8 percent of our energy would come from clean, renewable sources by 2020 (compared to 2 percent today). Blueprint policies would increase that to 20 percent, pumping billions into the economy and creating jobs as a result.
- Compared to the Bush plan, implementing Clean Energy Blueprint policies would save consumers $440 billion between now and 2020, and $105 billion annually thereafter. The resulting pollution reduction would create additional savings – like improved public health that would lower insurance and medical costs.
- A former CIA director, a former national security advisor, and a former chair of the Joint Chiefs of Staff have endorsed policies included in the Blueprint because they enhance national security. The Bush plan doesn't.

Energy efficiency and renewable power development are in the nation's best interest – the Clean Energy Blueprint proves it. But Bush, Cheney and company, even as they claim to be public servants, put the interests of their cronies and contributors first. On energy, they're leading us down the wrong path.

TomPaine.com – Energy: Which Way Will We Go?
With excerpts from the Clean Energy Blueprint.

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TO GO DEEP INTO THE NORTH SLOPE WHERE THE OIL IS, YOU NEED A LOT OF HEAVY EQUIPMENT AND, OF COURSE, A ROAD TO RUN IT ON. SO WE USE THE WATER AND ICE ALREADY THERE TO BUILD ONE. BUT LONG BEFORE THAT, WE USE INFRARED TECHNOLOGY NORMALLY USED TO MONITOR PIPELINES TO LOOK FOR POLAR BEAR DENS. AND WHEN WE DO FIND THEM, WE GO ELSEWHERE, LEAVING MOTHERS AND CUBS SNUG IN THEIR BEDS. IN FOUR MONTHS, THE CUBS VENTURE OUT. THE ICE ROAD MELTS. IT'S SPRING IN ALASKA AGAIN. AND IT'S LIKE WE'VE NEVER BEEN THERE AT ALL. | phillips66.com

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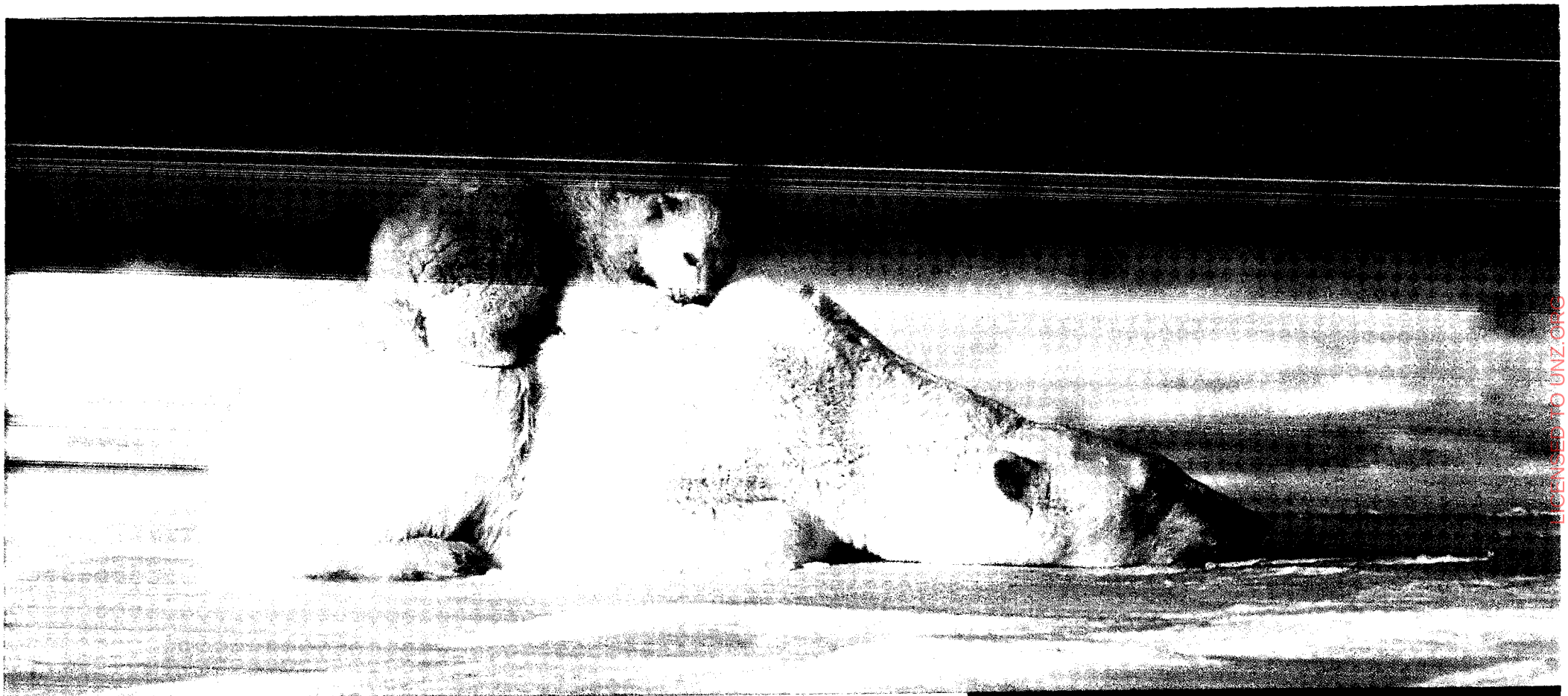

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